Beyond Memory

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As already mentioned, music trends in the US influenced the South African music industry. The success of female groups like trios and quartets in America gave rise to the emergence of such groups locally. These US success stories were groups like The Crystals, a quartet that had two massive hits *Then He Kissed Me* and *Da Doo Ron Ron* in 1963, Martha and the Vandellas (1967, *Jimmy Mack*), The Shirelles (*Dedicated To The One I Love*, 1961), The Ronettes (*Baby I Love You*, 1964), The Supremes (*Stoned Love*, 1971), Love Unlimited (*Walking In The Rain With The One I Love*, 1972), Pointer Sisters (*Fire*, 1978) and The Marvelettes (*When You're Young And In Love*, 1967).

In South Africa this trend started with groups like *The Skylarks* in 1956 made up of Miriam Makeba, Mummy Girl Nketele, Mary Rabotapi and Helen van Rensburg. In the early eighties the hit *Paradise Road* took *Joy* to greater heights both locally and abroad. The trio’s members were Anneline Malebo, Felicia Marion and Thoko Ndlozi. They dominated the charts, won two Sarie awards and even toured the United Kingdom. The demise of the trio saw the members embark on own projects: Anneline later became a member of South Of Sahara and Shadiii respectively while she also featured on Hugh Masekela’s Botswana-recorded album, *Waiting For The Rain*; Felicia Marion became a member of gospel group Sweetwater Amanzimtoti and later released a solo album *My Heart Is His*, which won SAMA 2’s Best Contemporary Gospel Performance category; Thoko Ndlozi released a maxi single *Joburg* and featured in various albums as a session musician.

In Tembisa, Sam “JizaJiza” Mthembu, a hot dancer or “majaivane” from Lydenburg (now Mashishing) formed a trio called Tembisa Happy Queens in 1975. Their live performances were very popular. In 1979 their name was changed to...
**Hot Soul Singers** and they were Lindiwe Ndlovu and sisters Ntombfuthi and Nombuso Mabaso. By 1980 the trio had such mass appeal that they became the supporting act for visiting American musicians like Clarence Carter (1980), Two Tons Of Fun and Gene Chandler (1981) at the Colosseum Theatre. Most of these shows were organised by The Quibell Brothers. They also toured with The Ojays during their Orlando stadium and Mmabatho stadium shows. One of their big hits was *Jiza Jiza Wame* dedicated to their manager, Sam Mthembu by his wife Nombuso Mabaso. With the experience he gained from their many shows Sam became a showbiz promoter taking his trio to many venues in southern Africa. At the beginning of 1984 they had a show in Mpumalanga. On the way they were involved in a terrible road accident near Vaalbank, which claimed the life of his lead vocalist and wife, Nombuso Mabaso. The band choreographer and composer who grew up in Natal had just given birth to Senzo Zephania Mthembu at home in Tembisa. Sam who was seriously injured was admitted to the Hillbrow Hospital. The real cause of that accident remains a mystery to many. Upon recovery Sam organised a tribute concert to his wife at Jabulani Amphitheatre. Still on crutches, he was also recording a tribute album at the Satbel Studios, which would include his late wife’s favourite hit *Going Crazy* composed by NC Mcondobi and produced by Mac Mathunjwa on the Third World Music label. The Hot Soul Singers continued with members Barbara Tyronne, Nandipha Ngcukane and Ntombfuthi Mabaso. In 1986 when they released a mini album, *We Are Very Hot*, on the Teal Record label the line-up was: Thoko Evidence Mgaga (lead vocalist), Phumzile Cecilila Phakathi and Busisiwe Patience Zungu. It was engineered by Sam Wingate and produced by JizaJiza who roped in some of today’s well-known musicians like Daniel “Black Soux” Phakoe who later used the name “Sox”, as well as Joeman Tladi of Sankomota fame. In 1988 they released First Stop on the Teal Sound label co-produced by Sam Mthembu and Tamsanqa Mpahlwa. Although Sam later did some PRO job for CCP, he kept the name alive.

In 1967 Tu Nokwe formed a trio in Durban’s Kwa Mashu Township. In the beginning the trio’s name was The Black Angels, but was later changed to The Angels. It was made up of sisters Tu and Marilyn Nokwe as well as the late Jean Madubane. In July 1984 they were requested to back Sipho “Hotstix” Mabuse at Durban’s Kings Park Stadium. They impressed the crowd including talent scouts. Kwela and jazz guitarist, the late Allen Kwela, featured them in his solo recording *The Unknown* in Durban that very year. They impressed composer/arranger Victor Ntoni with their versatility, which allowed them to switch between pop and jazz. Towards the end of that year they arrived at RPM offices and signed a contract under Cheryl Sack’s management. They were handed over to producer Mac Mathunjwa. Mac is the son of the Merry Black Birds’ trumpeter, Enock “Knox” Mathunjwa. In 1985 their maxi single *Johnny Boy* was released to the excitement of music-loving South Africans. The music was
written by N.C. Mcondobi and engineered by Sam Wingate. In 1986 another maxi single followed with two strong tracks on both sides He’s My Lover and My Love Is Not For Sale. The year 1987 saw the release of their full album Mr No Problem engineered by Mark Holland and mixed by Richard Mitchell. But just as RPM was planning bigger things for the album, which like the maxis was on the Right Track label, disaster struck and Mac Mathunjwa’s dreams were shattered. Jean Madubane, who was the trio’s lead vocalist died in a horrible car crash near Kroonstad on Sunday, 20 September 1987. She was a backing vocalist together with Marilyn Nokwe on Stimela’s 1987 National Tour: “The Unfinished Story”. She was part of the passengers in Ray Phiri’s car. According to their official itinerary they had performed at Free State Stadium in Bloemfontein on that day and were heading for their next venue, Kwa-Thema Civic in Springs. Ray himself was badly injured whereas assistant tour co-ordinator Peter Kunene, and Ashley Subel did not survive the crash. The accident shocked music lovers across southern Africa as Stimela and The Angels were at the peak of their careers. Our musical flags were flown at half mast to mourn crusaders who died in action. Several songs were written by fellow musicians to pay tribute to these gallant cadres of our cultural revolution. The two daughters of Alfred Nokwe and Patty (nee Masuku) were to keep the name of The Angels alive. Very difficult.

Having already released a solo album, Ubuhle Bami, in 1985 with tracks like Izwe Lezinyosi and Kwa Rowena, Tu Nokwe released another album titled Mind Your Own Business (1989) produced by Richard Siluma and co-engineered by Lee Short and Daryll Heilbron on the Gallo GRC label. Tu is a talented singer, composer, teacher and one of South Africa’s few female guitarists. According to industry insiders, she went into music through the motivation of jazzman Bheki Mseleku. She taught herself to play the guitar and also got into acting. After the 1976 student uprisings, together with her family, she founded Amajika Youth and Children’s Arts Project. The project teaches and trains young people in fields like music, dance theatre and life skills. More than 2 500 students went through it including Deborah Fraser, Leleti Khumalo and Somizi Mhlongo. In recognition of the good work performed by projects of this magnitude, donors and sponsors are always willing to assist. An example of that was when in 2005 the Tu Nokwe Projects Trust received financial assistance from the United States Ambassador’s Cultural Preservation Fund.

Her 1996 Teal Records release was Inyakanyaka co-produced by Thapelo Khomo and her brother Papi Nokwe, except for Tula, which was self-produced. The album was also engineered by Ian Osrin and includes a Thapelo Khomo/Tu Nokwe/Jabu Khanyile composition, Ubuntu, featuring the duet of Tu and Jabu. It also featured maestro bassist Don Gumbo, saxophonist Mike Makhalemele and the guitars of George Phiri, Louis Mhlanga, Bheki Khoza and Johnny Chonco. It was nominated Best Music Video, Best Female Solo Vocal Performance and
Song Of The Year in the 3rd annual FNB SAMAs. In 2001 she released Ubuntu, an album she co-produced with Andile Yenana and Herbie Tsoaeli. It was nominated in the Best Producer category and won the Best Xhosa Music section of SAMAs. Tu, whose very first composition was Relax, became an accomplished singer, composer, lyricist, guitarist, actress and tutor. She’s toured countries like Europe, the UK and the US where she enrolled at the reputable Manhattan School Of Music in New York. She has featured in a number of other musicians’ albums. Her acting highlights include Singing The Times and Shaka Zulu. In 2002 she released the album African Child, which was nominated for SAMAs’ Best Female Album. By 2006 she was directing a musical titled Ngiwafunge Ambomvu at Johannesburg’s Wendybrow Theatre. In 2007 she produced the debut CD of her niece, Ayanda Nhlangothi, titled Music To Me. Ayanda is member of Amajika, which is known to its members as “M7”. Ayanda’s mother, Marilyn later worked with the crossover group, Mango Groove.

Later on the producer of The Angels, Mac Mathunjwa, went into acting with credits including Umfo Ka Mkhize (1984), Gandhi – The Making of the Mahatma (1996) as well as tv dramas like Khululeka and award-winning comedy Stokvel for which he also composed the theme song.

Former members of South Of Sahara, Tshidi Helen Leloka and Anneline Malebo met a former member of The All Rounders, Faith Shadi Kekana and formed a new trio, Shadiii. It was named after Faith but spelled with three i’s at the end to show that they were three, as in Bob Marley’s backing vocalists, I-Three (Rita Marley, Marcia Griffiths & Judy Mowatt). Shadiii released a maxi single, Yes I’m Gonna Give It Up, in 1985 on RPM’s Right Track label written by Sizwe Zako, produced by Allister Coakley and engineer, Creg Cutler. Maybe I should pay a special tribute to Faith Shadi Kekana, daughter of a preacherman who featured in many music projects before going solo. She has travelled the world backing superstars as a vocalist. Besides her session musicianship, she’s been a member of the All Rounders, Shadiii as well as Varukweru whose members included Vusi Khumalo (drums), Bakithi Khumalo (bass), Zoli Bacela (guitar) and Ndumiso Nyovane (trumpet). Sadly, Bacela passed away in August 2006, a few days before the death of talented saxophonist, Moses Khumalo. By 2008 Faith had released her debut solo album titled Ha Re Yeng produced by Condry Ziqubu.

Former member of the Sound Busters and CJB band, Thami Mdluli and Buli Arosi formed a duo and used the first syllables of their names as a coinage – Tha + Bu. To make meaning out of the sound it was spelled Taboo. Some of their hits include Red For Danger, Self-Service, Amigo and Vampire on the EFP label produced by Professor Rhythm (Thami Mdluli) himself. Their albums include Self-Service, Amigo, Vampire, Salute, Ba Ile, Amasela, The Woman Nextdoor, Sex Is Taboo and Noma Bangatheni.

Sello Chicco Twala formed a female trio. On his We Miss You Manelow album
one of the tracks, *Rachimo*, seems to have inspired the trio’s name – *Chimora*. This group’s members were Tiny Mbuli, Makie Motloung and the late Tshidi Wildeman. Sometimes they were referred to as “The Chicco Girls”. One of their early hits was *Mayibuye I-Afrika* from an album of the same name. Their 1991 album *Intandane* was also written and produced by Sello Twala and engineered by Adrian Hamilton on Dephon’s Roy B label. Besides the title track it also featured the hit *Munwe Na Munwe*. The trio’s Universal Music release was *Woza Moya*, a gospel CD that featured the hit *Ngangilambile*. In 1992 the subject of polygamy became the title of their CD, Abalazi Ababili with guest artist Zakhele Gumede on the Teal Records label. Some of their mid-90s big hits were *Romano* and *Africano American*. On an album simply titled Chimora the duo of Nomuntu Kappa and Mohapi Mashego fronted the trio. Besides the already-mentioned *Some More My Cherry* the album also featured *Daddy’s Dead* and *Bad Boys*. They featured Nomuntu Kappa on *Being Bitchy is My Kind Of Fun*.


In the Eastern Cape Tammarrra Maqanda of Zwide tested her potential in The Shell Road To Fame talent search in her hometown, Port Elizabeth. She realised that her future was in music and moved to Johannesburg. Up in KwaZulu-Natal Buyisiwe Maphumulo of Eshowe went to a music session at the Durban SABC television studios. Here she met another music enthusiast from Ntuzuma, Nozipho Mtshali. They became friends and did some appearances together in their province, but later decided to move to Johannesburg. Stimela’s bassist, Jabu Sibumbe introduced Tammarrra to the two and introduced the three girls to Rufaro band manager and producer Sidwell Duda who named them *Elegance*. The girls backed Rufaro in the recording of their maxi single, *The Mighty Birds*. With the help of the band’s keyboard and guitar player Ephraim Hlope they released their debut mini album *Waiting For You* (Challenger, 1987) engineered by Richard Mitchell, Andre Herbst and Fernando Perdigao. It featured hot tracks like *Sunshine* and *Hey Little Boy*.

Kelly Ndlovu brought three girls together: Elsie Nyembe from Dube in
Soweto, Khanyisile Sibiya from Durban and Lizzy Makunyane from Tembisa. The sweetest desire is to see people make use of the talents God has given them. Their desire to do just that gave them the name Sweet Desire. Their debut album Sugar Daddy (Teal Sound, 1986) was produced by Kelly. 1989 saw them release Sugar Man on the Thuthuka label engineered by David Moloele. The trio will be remembered for their hit Love Knows No Age Limit.

In 1992 producer Emmanuel Diale and engineer Lucas Mokoena took three girls named PVP into the Suite3 Studios to put together their first album, Mannyeo on the MOB music label. One of the best tracks on the album was Tell Me Why. The name of the trio was an abbreviation of the first letters in each one’s name.

One of the most powerful duets of the eighties was a hit machine called Cheek To Cheek. Its key members were keyboard magician Dougmore Madoda Malotana and singing sensation, Phumi Maduna. Before he met Phumi, Madoda was playing for Johnny Clegg and Sipho Mchunu’s mighty cross-over band, Juluka.

Phumelele Yvonne Maduna was born on 22 August 1958. She grew up in Orlando East and attended Emthunjweni Lower Primary, Law Palmer Higher Primary, Orlando High and Kwa-Ceza High School. She is the last-born in a family of six. A lover of music and books, she started singing at the age of twenty. Her interest in showbiz motivated her to join playwright Sam Mhangwani’s stage plays and later the late Gibson Kente’s. This is where she first met Brenda Fassie. Later she sang for The Mushrooms with Brenda, but The Soul Brothers noticed her talent and invited her to do the first half in their shows. It was at this point that she met Madoda. Their debut album So Good, So Nice was released in 1984 on CCP’s Bullet label. It was produced by Mally Watson and all the tracks were written by Madoda. They played almost the same music as that of Brenda and The Big Dudes, but with a dominating and stinging keyboard. Their other albums were One More Try (1985) and Can’t Buy Love (1986). After the split of the band, with the encouragement of her mother Mabel, Phumi went solo and released her debut album Bad Guy. Almost maintaining the CTC sound, she worked with Anthony Mthembu on keyboards and the album was produced by Selwyn Shandel. Later Ray Mkhize of Gallo Records informed me that she had joined Lucky Dube and switched to Reggae music under the name Sister Phumi.

Madoda Malotana brought Suthukazi Arosi and Velaphi Mnisi together to form Oshakati. Their debut album Fire was dedicated to the people of Namibia from where they got their name. The album was written, produced and arranged by Madoda. Richard Mitchell was the producer.

Neither Madoda nor Phumi became bigger than Cheek To Cheek as solo artists. On Sunday, 18 May 2008 the two announced on national television that they were reviving the group. To demonstrate that, they sampled their
forthcoming album performing a gospel track titled Woza ku Jesu.

Ecstasy was a duet made up of sisters Edith and Amelia Mnwela. In 1985 they recorded a maxi single, Take Me Out, co-written by brothers Koloi and the late Japie Lebona. It was produced by Koloi and engineered by Fab Grosso on the Hope Records label. In 1997 they were flying high on radio charts with Don’t Stop The Music co-produced by Hendrik Koloi Lebona and Monty Bogatsu of The Minerals and The Directors fame.

In 1991 the duo Ivory hit the market with a self-titled album, co-written and produced by the Ngcobo couple, Bheki and Linah for White Horse Productions on the Music Team label.

Xarila’s album Mmane (Stepmother) was produced by Malcolm X aka Malcolm Makume on the EFP label. All the music was written by Edwin Goodman, N. Baloi and P. Bundu.

The name of the late seventies Langa township group, Tiny Tots resurfaced when Thabo Mosia composed music for four small girls. Their self-titled 1991 disco album was co-produced by Lefty Rhikoto (Mordillo) and Thabo himself. It was co-engineered by Neville Fox and Dean Spencley on RPM’s Tiger label.

Mosia’s other kids group was Chukucha whose album Selina (1989) was released on the Umkhonto Records label.