Long before the national agenda of the African Renaissance, some musicians had already started the journey to self-rediscovery. The champions of this movement include a man who knighted himself “Sir Alton” — Dumisani Alton Mashaba. This giant was born on 24 December 1954, the seventh child in a family of 12 within the community of the Mandzawu in the former Eastern Transvaal. Dumisani became a famous singer, writer, arranger and producer. After matric, he studied Theology with UNISA, but the artist in him cried out louder. To prepare himself for the world of showbiz, he did a management diploma with the Institute of Personnel Management and studied drama through the National Dramatic Guild of New York. He toured South Africa with his most successful drama, The Promise, and managed a group called The New Generation. His second album, Dancers Of Africa, blended the Mandzawu/Tsonga traditional sounds with contemporary rhythms to bring out a Pan African feel. Just when his kind of sound started appealing to the masses he crossed over to the other world.

Following in his footsteps, a regiment of mostly young musicians also produced a blend of music that could easily appeal to Africans anywhere in the continent and the diaspora. Even established jazz legends like Hugh Masekela joined the trend and made us very proud to be who we are — unashamedly African!

Another band of the time, Tou had a big hit titled Legato Ka Legato and featured on the charts of most black radio stations in the eighties.

Sandile Ringo Madlingozi was born in 1964 in Gugulethu township, Cape Town. He was into music from a very young age and fell in love with The
Beatles’ drummer, Ringo Starr aka Richard Starkey. His idolisation of Ringo led to his nickname. He cut his musical teeth in a local group, Ikwezi, writing songs and singing in Langa. At a Cape Town jazz workshop in 1984 he met Alan Cameron and their common vision led to the formation of an eight-man band, PETO. The band became a huge success and won awards like Shell Road To Fame (1986) and Autumn Harvest Personalities Of The Year (1987). It was also nominated in the OKTV Awards’ Best Township Music category. The group released *Khaya – Where The Heart Is* (1988) featuring the title track.

In 1989 Ringo and Alan broke away from PETO to explore new horizons of their creativity in a new group, Gecko Moon. The name was symbolic of their meeting, inspired by the co-ordination of the moon and the earth. The new group’s self-titled debut album was released on the PVB label and set ablaze by hits like *Green Green* and *Reggae Party*. But later Ringo wanted to spread his creative wings wider and went solo. The night I interviewed Alan Cameron at a night club in Johannesburg he still talked with fondness about the glory days of Gecko Moon. Alan and S’Khumbuzo Fassie co-wrote *Taxi Jam* for S’Khumbuzo’s entry into the Coca-Cola Full Blast Music Show 3.

After the late Bob Marley producer, Chris Blackwell persuaded him to make music in his own language, Ringo released his debut album, *Sondela*. The album was so strong it won him SAMA’s Best Male Artist and Best Adult Contemporary categories. It also won a category in the Kora All Africa Music Awards. His *Mamelani* CD featured hits like *Ngizokulinda*. It won him the Best Male Artist category of SAMA 5. Ringo Madlingozi, who believes there’s always room for improvement, attended classes for training in his best instrument – his voice. Ringo also attended guitar lessons. By the way, he is also a good drummer and percussionist. The CD *Buyisa* won SAMA 7’s Best African Pop Album section. On the album he invited his peers to help him spread the love: Joe Nina, Oliver Mtukudzi, Steve Dyer, Fana Zulu, Victor Ntoni, Pondo Doloai, Tlale Makhene and Zolani Mkiva.

Ringo’s duet with Oliver Mtukudzi on *Into Yam* revived the hit in style. His powerful voice is so much in demand that he also guests on other musicians’ albums like on McCoy Mrubata’s 1999 album, *Phosa Nqusemva*, where he featured on the track *Abukho*. Ringo whose fan base is dominated by females was roped into the UB40 project when the group was requested by the UN’s Kofi Anan to help fight the Aids pandemic. *Ntumba* (2002) was nominated SAMA 9’s Best Adult Contemporary African Album. The following year he won the Best African Pop Album category for *Ringo Live*. In 2004 his album *Baleka* was nominated in SAMA 11’s Best Contemporary African Adult Album category. The 10th Kora All Africa Music Awards nominated him in the Best Male Artist: Southern Africa in the same year. Ringo, whose gap in his front teeth had almost become part of his brand, closed it in 2006 for health reasons as it never was his choice but the result of an accident in his days of yore. In
the same year he released a 16-track CD simply titled *Ndim Lo*, as if to say the real me is without a gap. In 2006 he released his second DVD, *Ringo Live 2*. The Massed Choir Festival 2007 featured him as the guest artist. His 2006 CD won the 8th Metro FM Music Awards’ Best Male Vocalist section.

**Jeff Maluleke** was born to Dora and Johannes Maluleke in Bushbuckridge. As a Maluleke he is a M’Nwanati; it is the name of his clan. He showed interest in music while still a student in Bushbuckridge. He met another student who was learning to play guitar, Patrick Dubazana, and together they started the long journey. Jeff entered the music scene in the early days of kwaito music working with Arthur Mafokate as Papa Jeff. Their album *Pinky Pinky Yo!* featured the hit *Chirwali*. Later with Patrick Dubazana they released their music under the name, Hagonya whose album *That’s The Way* (CCP, 1996) was nominated for SAMA 3’s Best Duo Or Group category. When he started releasing albums like *Djovo* as Jeff Maluleke And Hagonya it was clear that he intended going solo. The hit *Byala Bya Xintu* won SAMA 5’s Best Video category. His self-produced 2000 solo album *Juliana* was released by CCP Records and won him SAMA 7’s Best Producer category. It featured the hit *Sala N’wana Mama*. In 2001 he released *Kilimanjaro*, which he wrote, arranged and produced. It was engineered by Jasper Williams. It features tracks like *Woman Of Africa, Woman In A Desert* as well as *Let’s Save The World*. Like his previous CD, it was also nominated in the Best Producer category in SAMA 8 and won the Best Adult Contemporary African Album. In 2002 Kora All Africa Music Awards crowned him Revelation Of The Year. On the album *Mambo* he featured the legendary Hugh Masekela. His CD *Shimatsatsa* revealed a progressive master musician. In 2005 he released *Ndzilo*, which was nominated for the SAMAs. It was followed by *A Twist of Jeff* (2007) His other works include writing the signature theme for SABC 2’s comedy *Ashifa Shabba*. Jeff has taken xiTsonga music to another level.

In 1992 my friend Moss, whose music taste I’ve learned to respect over the years, bought me a music cassette as a present. He said it was the new African voice in music. It was titled *When You Come Back* and I fell in love with the voice, the guitar and the message. It is how I came to know a young musician called **Vusi Mahlasela**. It featured hauntingly beautiful tunes like *Tonkana*. Later when I introduced African music to the radio station I was leading, Vusi who was one of the political voices of the mid-eighties challenged me to come up with proper African jingles relevant to the vision of the station. When I returned the challenge, he obliged and that led to a professional relationship that we still share. At the time he lived with his grandmother Ida in Mamelodi, Tshwane. This is where besides being a political poet he taught himself to play a self-made guitar. Maybe I should mention that Mamelodi is one of the cultural melting pots of South Africa.

Born in Lady Selborne in 1965, Vusi Sidney Mahlasela grew up listening to the music of the Malombo Jazzmen as well as the African traditional dances
of the migrant hostel dwellers. His sharp and smooth voice endeared him to choirmasters and students alike at school. Poetry is his first love, hence the inclusion of the works of poets in his music. After the 1976 student uprisings Vusi got involved in protest activities and even joined the late Dr Fabian Ribeiro’s poetry group, The Ancestors Of Africa. With the guidance of the likes of Nadine Gordimer he received his poetry education. He belongs to that rare breed of African firebrands like Lefifi Tladi, Kgaefela Oa Magogodi, Ingoapele Madingoane, Lesego Rampolokeng, Duma ka Ndlovu, Maishe Maponya and the late Matsemela Manaka.

By 1986 Vusi had already recorded a maxi single as lead vocalist of a Mamelodi group, Mahube. Mahube was formed in 1979 by students Bethem, Philip, Bernard and Sydney, who were later joined by bassist Elias Seelane. The maxi single was produced by the late West Nkosi on Gallo’s Soul Jazz Pop label. My visit to his home resulted in the popular jingles that came to be associated with SABC’s Thobela FM in my time. He later asked me to serve as a director on the board of his project, the Vusi Mahlasela Music Development Foundation based at the South African State Theatre in Tshwane. I obliged. That is how I met the foundation’s administrator, Pat Ranoto, who in 2006 released his debut album, My Roots. Keyboardist Pat whose stage name is Wadee was born in Phahameng, Modimolle in Limpopo Province. It was when his parents moved to Mamelodi that he met Vusi. I’m always humbled by talented musicians who are down to earth and level-headed like Vusi. His Yamaha guitars have accompanied this former Pleasure Invaders member to release albums like When I Come Back (1992), Wisdom Of Forgiveness (1994), Silang Mabele (1997), Vusi Mahlasela And Louis Mhlanga Live At The Bassline (1999) and Miyela Afrika (2000) featuring Andy Narell, Faith Kekana and Tsepo Tshola. In 2002 he released Jungle Of Questions with a band he called Proud People’s Band made up of Johnny Motuba (drums), Elway Masango (bass guitar), Moses Mafiri (Acoustic guitar and alto sax), Queen Ranyama (vocals), Tani Mello (keyboards) and Paul Majoro (Electric guitar). It was nominated in SAMA 9’s Best Producer category. Whenever we met Vusi would ask me to trace the particulars of his old favourite song, Ali Mapulana’s Kolobjana’ Makgolo (Kolozwana) and I was only too glad to do so. He included it on the album and it became one of his most popular songs at festivals. Vusi has won many awards including SAMA 4’s Best African Pop and Best Male Solo categories. His other album, Miyela Afrika, was nominated in the Best Producer category of SAMA 7. He was also honoured by the Kora All Africa Music Awards as well as PANSALB for his promotion of various indigenous languages through his music. The man affectionately known as “The Voice” has travelled extensively around the world and played with star guitarists like George Benson and Joan Armatrading. His best professional friend is Zimbabwe-born Louis Mhlanga. BMG Africa is his musical home where he’s worked very close with Lance McCormack. As part of his 87th birthday celebrations in July
2005, former state president Dr Nelson Mandela made Vusi an ambassador of his 46664 HIV/AIDS Programme together with TV actress/youth presenter Kim Engelbrecht, SABC 2 Morning Live presenter Leanne Manas and fellow musician, Dozi. On 14 November 2006 Vusi received the honour of being entered into the Afropop Hall Of Fame in New York City. He told me how humbled he felt to receive the great honour already bestowed on music giants like the Mensa of Mali, Salif Keita and the “Prince of Mbalax”, Youssou N’Dour before him. While some music lovers across the world may recognise him as the man whose music helped the film Tsotsi to win an Oscar Award, some will salute him as the musician whose CD Naledi Ya Tsela (Guiding Star) was released in the US and climbed on to the ATO Records charts in March 2007. The CD won two SAMA categories of Best Male Artist and Best Engineer, which went to Lloyd Ross. His strong character saw him defeat epilepsy by accepting and managing it. A true African who is passionate about his roots, Vusi traced his genealogy to the Zwane’s; that is how his full names became Vusi Sidney Mahlasela Ka Zwane.

Jabu Khanyile’s father, Mathimula, was a singer in Mbube groups. He was of royal blood; in fact he was supposed to be a chief in Nkandla, KwaZulu-Natal but due to work in Johannesburg he ended up making Soweto his home. Jabulani was born on 8 February 1957 in Soweto. He was a self-taught drummer and guitarist who was fascinated by The Question Marks hit Hey Mr Moonlight. As Jabulani grew up in Mofolo, all his mother Mamofokeng wished for him was to become an announcer. No, not a radio announcer, but a train schedule announcer. Yes, you guessed right, the voice above our heads at the railway station that says “The next train to Soweto will leave Platform 14 at 4 p.m!” His brother John was a dancer for The Additions, a band owned by Joseph Madeira. The band was formerly known as The Daffodils and in those days had a big hit titled Millie. John later played drums in the band. Members of the band were Ignatius Madeira, Frans Madeira, Ace Mbuya and John Khanyile. In 1974 Jabulani joined the band as a drummer too. One of their biggest hits was Chelete produced by the late Roxy “Black Cat” Buthelezi. In 1978 Jabu moved over to join The Movers under the management of the late David Thekwane. As “Bra Day” also managed Boyoyo Boys, the two bands regularly traded roles; that’s why Jabu’s voice is heard on the Boys’ monster hit Pule, which was later also re-arranged by UK’s Malcolm McLaren. In 1984 he joined Bayete, a band previously known as Jaws. In its Jaws days its members were Jaws Dlathu (bass guitar), Arthur Shabalala (keyboards), Johnny Chonco (guitar), Raymond Molefe (trumpet), Mfaniseni Thuse (trombone), Mduduzi Magwaza (alto saxophone) as well as two ladies, Mandisa Dlanga and Stella Khumalo. When the ladies left the band, the guys gave it a new name – Bayete. The name was inspired by the Zulu royal salute. As already indicated in the first chapter of this book, in 1984 Bayete joined Koloi Sabata Lebona’s Kaya Records and recorded a self-titled album with the hit Shosholoza. Just after the recording of
that album, new members joined the band: Jabu Khanyile (drums), Themba Mkhize (keyboards) and Fana Zulu (bass guitar). Themba and Fana were from the band, Sakhile. In the new set-up Jabu and Themba wrote the band’s music. The Bayete that recorded Blue Monday (Decibel Music, 1986) had so changed the line-up that it had only two of the 1984 members, viz. Mfaniseni Thuse and Arthur Shabalala. The other musicians were Kelly Petlane and Sello Mphatsoane (horns), Jabu Khanyile (vocals and drums), Fana Zulu (bass), Themba Mkhize (synthesiser), Chwane Mhlongo (first guitar). Blue Monday was produced by Jerry Mhlanga and Chwane Mhlongo and engineered by Keith Forsyth. In 1987 they released Mbombela, which featured the title track and was accompanied by a powerful video. Ha Re Yeng Hae was released on CCP’s Flame label in 1990. The self-produced album featured the hit Mbube and was engineered by Richard Mitchell. With the African map on the cover, that album reflected the new vision of the band – “Ha Re Yeng Hae” – back to our roots. On the album there were two new names, Sello Montwedi (drums) and Levy Kgasi (trumpet and flugel horn). Guest artists were Scorpion Madondo (alto sax), Louis Moreira (trumpet), Khaya Mahlangu (tenor sax) and John Hassan (percussion). That was the last album of the old Bayete before the band split.

Jabu Khanyile went solo and in 1993 felt the need to revive Bayete as his backing band. From there they would be known as Jabu Khanyile and Bayete. His old writing partner, Themba Mkhize, who toured the African continent with Caiphus Semenya, brought him a collection of West African music on his return. After listening to the whole collection and blending it with South African mbaqanga and township soul, he came out with a truly Afrocentric sound that became his trademark. I can easily relate to the exercise because when I was a radio deejay the late great guitar king, Marks Mankwane, would bring me tapes of programmes from radio stations around the world. He did that as he was touring with Makgonatšohle Band backing Mahlathini and Mahotella Queens. That exposed me to world music early in my career and shaped my views on the people of the world and their music. To strategise for the new vision, Jabu had to get the new African sound right and to achieve that he had to work with a new producer. Having fallen in love with Kamazu’s products, he approached his producer, Thapelo Khomo. Their debut album was Mmalo-We (Teal Records), recorded at the Digital Cupboard and engineered by Ian Osrin. All the tracks were composed by Jabu and Thapelo who produced the album and also played all keyboards. For backing vocals he used some of the best voices in the industry: Khanyo Maphumulo, Khululwe Sithole, Thembi Kubheka, Batho Mhlongo and Tshidi Mannye. Three tracks sold the album – Mmalo-We, Thabo and Ten Times Love. It won the first SAMA’s Best Performance – Male, Best Producer and Song Of The Year categories. His other albums were Umkhaya Lo (1996), Africa Unite (1997), Umathimula (1998), What About Tomorrow? (1999), The Prince (1999), Thobekile (2000 SAMA Best Group & Video), Umbele (2001) and Wa
When we met in 2005 he was launching *Hiyo Lento*, which was released by Lindelani Mkhize Entertainment (LME). His backing vocalists in the live performance that night of the launch were his wife Khululiwe Sithole, Ayanda Zulu and Themba Masemola.

By 2004 he had collected eight SAMAs, 2 Koras, Anti-Racism Stand Award, which he received in Spain in 1999 and Best Outstanding Performance: Royal Command – for his performance at the Royal Albert Hall on Thursday 11 July 1996 where Queen Elizabeth was so impressed by his performance that she stood up and danced!

Jabu was also a celebrated producer. Among his productions are Khululiwe Sithole’s CD *Isondlo* (1997) on which he involved Godfrey Pilane with whom he had previously worked on his own albums. He co-produced Bambata’s CDs, *1906* and *Ukhandampondo* (poll tax) with Sipho Sithole on the Gallo Records label. The two men were jointly nominated in SAMA 7’s Best Producer category for 1906. Jabu told me there were some unforgettable moments of his career that he would take with him to the grave.

When he was performing with Bayete in Mmabatho, a lady cleaner at the Mmabana Cultural Centre asked her son to carve a wooden sculpture of Jabu singing. The woman presented it to him with pride.

While performing *Ha Re Yeng Hae* at Kippies, a Mosotho sangoma woman kneeled in front of him and got possessed by the spirits right there!

At one of his shows in Germany a woman bound to a wheelchair approached the stage and asked for an encore, whereupon she stood up and danced!

In Kenya at a show he shared with Sankomota, a blind man talking to him through an interpreter gave him a fly-whisk made from a giraffe tail symbolising African royalty.

Jabu had toured most of the continent’s countries including a performance during the inauguration of Olesegun Obasanjo as president of Nigeria. Outside Africa he’d been to the UK, USA, Europe and Australia. Guest artists on his albums included Youssou N’Dour, Papa Wemba, Wally Badarou, Lagbaja, Lucky Dube, Javi Noti and Trilox Gurtu. He also did duets with musicians like Yvonne ChakaChaka on Caiphus Semenya’s *Ndiphendule* as well as Tu Nokwe on her *Ubuntu*, which he also had composed. In 2001 he was part of the “Asiphephe” road safety awareness campaign for the KwaZulu-Natal province. He recorded the album with Mandoza, Ladysmith Black Mambazo, Deborah Frazer and Busi Mhlongo. Jabu was part of Sir Bob Geldof’s 2005 “Make Poverty History” Live 8 Concert in South Africa. By the way, Jabu was the neighbour of his producer Thapelo Khomo in Dobsonville. By 2006 his fans were beginning to worry because of reports of his ill-health due to sugar diabetes. On Sunday, 12 November 2006 as I was driving to the local shopping complex, I was shocked to hear the radio announce his death caused by the conditions he battled to the last breath – sugar diabetes and prostate cancer. I could not believe that
even before the flowers on Lebo Mathosa’s grave had lost their freshness the country had lost another icon. Jabulani Khanyile (49) was laid to rest on Friday, 17 November 2006 at Avalon Cemetery, Soweto. The “prince” left behind his two wives Nomasonto and Khululwiwe as well as nine children. What more confirmation that he was a prince can one ask for than the adherence of the majestic rains to the traditional royal send-off? As a consolation to his many fans after his death, a DVD he had recorded with Busi Mhlongo live at the Market Theatre was released.

Great minds think alike, but do great minds die alike? Two weeks after Eddie Levert’s “prince” Gerald toured South Africa, he passed away due to a heart attack. It was as if this American “prince” and our African “prince” Jabu Khanyile agreed to walk together to the other side. You ask why? Read this:

- Both died on the same weekend
- Both died of chronic ailments
- Both died in their 40s (Jabu 49, Gerald 40)
- Both were recipients of the KORA All Africa Music Awards (Jabu SA/Gerald Diaspora)
- Both were buried on Friday, 17 November 2006
- Both had musician fathers

Surely, the African gods must have smiled as they welcomed two of their talented sons to join the bigger orchestra up there.

Let me pay tribute to that bass player who shared a name with the band he played for – Jaws. Christopher Mlungisi Christopher Dlathu was born on 14 September 1957 at Van Wykrsus. His father, Douglas of the Xhosa Mayirha clan, used to sing in choirs. His mother Eunice was also a chorister. In the late sixties the family moved to White City Jabavu in Soweto. Chistopher is one of four boys and six sisters. Two of his brothers Sisco and Sidney were musicians. Sisco played guitar for the Square Souls in Dobsonville; Sidney was a double-flute player who specialised in a C and a G blowing them simultaneously. The left-handed Chris always ran into trouble with Sisco as he would play his guitar while his brother had gone to work. The problem was that he had to retune the guitar to suit a left-handed player, a trick he was taught by a maskandi musician. He practiced almost every day after school and when Sisco returned he’d be greeted by the strange sound from his guitar and know that his brother had fiddled with his instrument. Chris was later roped into the family music group called Dlathu’s Band. Sam Maishwane of the Heroes in Orlando recruited him. Chris played his first professional bass guitar with the band consisting of Sammy Maishwane (leader), George, Mofuta and Balaza. When The Heroes disbanded, Sam who was later known as Sammy Klaas formed The Sounds in Dobsonville. The band was managed by the late David Thekwane. One of their hits was Six
Mabone (S’azi Abangcono) with lead vocalist Rammy McKenzie who was from The Young Lovers. Later The Sounds left David to be a resident band at the Cobweb Night Club in King Williamstown. They changed their name to The Chosen Few. Under the production skills of Koloi Lebona they had hits like Ride On Dancing. For about seven years under Sabata’s management they performed mainly in Cape Town. The band was so versatile and played all sorts of music styles; this made them all-rounders. The disadvantage of that was the lack of identity, which ultimately frustrated the group and led to its split in 1987. Some members joined Kenny Sephai’s Rasmataz. The new line-up was Sammy Klaas (lead guitar), Bushy Seatlholo (keyboards), Christopher Dlathu (bass guitar) and Carlton Malete (drums). It was around that time that the band The Big Dudes was formed to back Brenda Fassie who was also part of Rasmataz.

It is interesting how Chris got the name Jaws. They went to perform in Boksburg and on their arrival the coloured music fans were disappointed to see a small boy carrying a big bass guitar. But when the show started, they were all shocked by the magical performance of the boy. One man took him to his house and told his family, “Don’t be deceived by his size, on stage he is as powerful as Jaws.” The name stuck. Four years later he went to play with Rich Fever in Durban. After three years with the rock ‘n roll band, he returned to Johannesburg to play at the Pelican with Impact, which later changed the name to Exit. Wings Segale and Linda Bernard approached them with an overseas performance contract. The promoters wanted an African band so Exit got a new African name – Thetha. Jaws left the group to work with Chicco Twala and Yvonne Chaka chaka at Dephon. Bakithi Khumalo who worked with West Nkosi joined the new band to replace Jaws on bass guitar. During his time with Chicco their biggest hits were Makhombo and We Miss You Manelow. After four years he started freelancing and among others he played for Hugh Masekela, Caiphus Semenya, Thandi Klaasen and Jonas Gwangwa.

As I talked to him he was strumming his favourite bass guitar, a Steinberger. Among his professional peers he spoke with admiration about Fana Zulu, Jabu Sibumbe, Victor Masondo, Victor Ntoni, Herbie Tsoaelli, Mlungisi Gegana, Musa Manzini, Bakithi Khumalo and one of the first electric bass players in South Africa, Joseph Makwela of Makgonatšohle Band.

In 1981 six guys formed one of the most progressive bands of the eighties and named it Sakhile. They were Sipho Gumede (bass guitar), Khaya Mahlangu (saxophone), Gabriel Segwagwa Thobejane (percussion), Menyatso Mathole (guitar), Madoda Mathunjwa (drums) and Don Laka (keyboards). Don was later replaced by Themba Mkhize. In 1982 they released their self-titled debut album. From the onset Sakhile was never your average band; it was a classy, intellectual, laid-back band of the elite. As a result, their music sales suffered a great deal. You see, the real music buyers are the grassroot people who have no connections in higher places, but the music was above their heads. The elite are
not a good sales support clientele; if they buy music it is mostly from the US or the UK. Whenever they need a local album they’ll call so and so to ask for a sample or complementary copy. After this album the group disbanded. Sipho Gumede formed a group called Peace. The huge public outcry that followed made the members think twice and in 1987 they staged a comeback in Soweto at Eyethu Cinema. In the new set-up Thembeka Mkhize was substituted by Alexandra-born Jabu Nkosoni on keyboards, whereas drummer Madoda Mathunjwa was replaced by Percy Kunene. The band revived its former glory and in 1988 they were invited to perform in Switzerland and Italy. Their determination to play quality African music despite the poor sales created tensions between them and the record companies, which determined the success of a band on the basis of sales. Their albums included New Life (1983), African Echoes (1989), Phambili (1989), Welcome Home (1992) and Sakhile (1997). The latter was digitally remastered by Sony Music as part of its Classic Collection series. As almost every member of the band was a musician in his own right, it was not long before they each went solo. In 1997 Sony Music Entertainment released a compilation album of their great hits under its Classic Collection series.

Today we know Khaya Mahlangu as a respected saxophone star in his own right. Khaya was born in Soweto in 1954 and started playing trumpet while under guidance of musician, writer and film maker Molefe Phineas Pheto in the early seventies. It was at high school level that he switched to this life-long relationship with the saxophone. Having played for Balupi, he had a stint with the Beaters in 1975 and by 1976 he was part of the resident band at the Orlando East nightclub, Pelican, which has been an incubator for most of our musicians like Lebo Morake. Realising the need to sharpen his skills, he went to study music at the University Of Zululand (now KwaZulu-Natal) under a man he met in a township youth programme back in 1971 in Soweto, Professor Khabi Mngoma.

In 1980 he joined Spirits Rejoice led by the late Duke Makasi. A year later he joined Sakhile. A former member of Dondo, Khaya featured on many musicians’ albums and worked with the likes of Abdullah Ibrahim and Jonas Gwangwa. Khaya toured the US and Europe with Hugh Masekela and Miriam Makeba. He arranged, produced and played in Hugh Masekela’s 2002 album, Time. His other productions include Busi Mhlongo’s Freedom. The respected Mahlangu was the musical director of the television jazz programme Bejazzled (2001) for which he also composed the theme song. He also released his own albums like the album To You My Dear (1985). Working with the best in the game like Fana Zulu, Sylvester Mazinyane, Prince Lengoasa, Hugh Masekela and Sibongile Khumalo, Khaya later released a ten-track album titled Khululeka in 2006. It was nominated for the Best Contemporary Jazz Album category of the SAMA.

Jabu Nkosi released Back Home (1990) and Remembering Bra Zacks (1997) dedicated to his legendary saxophonist father Isaac “Zacks” Nkosi. His other
projects include *Our Kind Of Jazz Vol. 1, Roots and Rosie* (2003). Jabu featured on various musicians’ albums and played at many shows as a session musician.

**Gabriel Segwagwa Thobejane** who started playing with his uncle Dr Philip Tabane in Mamelodi found a collaborative home with Langa’s group, Amampondo. In 1996 he left South Africa with guitarist Madala Kunene to join the late Doc Mthalane in London. They featured on Mthalane’s last album *Respect* and together with Busi Mhlongo featured on one of the tracks, *Doda*. Thobejane released his solo album *Madiba* (1997) and like his band mates featured on many albums and live performances of other groups. In 2004 he did shows with Madala Kunene and Bernard Sibusiso Mndaweni. He also joined the new wave of young poets to add rhythm and colour to their poetry sessions.

Pianist, composer, producer and musical director, **Themba Mkhize**, was born in Durban in 1957. He started out playing with a local band, Dukes Combo and later went professional in 1981 playing piano for Sakhile. While with the group they released the albums Sakhile and New Life. He toured a number of this continent’s countries with Caiphus Semenya’s musical, *Buwa*. He joined Bayete in 1984 and became one of the finest musicians in South Africa. His creativity and passion helped to shape today’s Bayete sound. In 1991 he was part of Hugh Masekela’s homecoming tour dubbed “Sekunjalo”. Some of his best productions include the 1998 Sibongile Khumalo Live At The Market Theatre, as well as her 2000 CD, *Immortal Secrets* for which he was nominated as Best Producer in SAMA 7. He has featured on many albums in South Africa including his work on the re-recording of Babsy Mlangeni’s *Sala Emma*. This 2001 recipient of the Daimler-Chrysler South African Jazz Award has also worked with Thembi Mtshali, Jimmy Dludlu, Linda Kekana as well as the SSQ. His piano graced the soundtrack of Zola Maseko’s film *Drum*. A calculative perfectionist, he ultimately released his own albums: *Tales From The South* (1999), *Lost And Found* (2001) and *Hands On* (2004). *Lost And Found* was nominated in the Best Producer category of the Standard Bank SAMA 8, whereas *Hands On* was nominated for Best Contemporary Jazz Album and won the Best Male Artist category in MTN SAMA 11. I love the positive philosophy on the sleeve cover of the album *Lost And Found* – “He Who Finds Himself, Was Never Lost”.

Themba was the musical director of Jazz Meets Symphony 2005. The Jazz Foundation of South Africa concert featured Bhekumuzi Luthuli, Xolisa Dlamini, Marcus Wyatt, Sello Galane and Themba Mkhize himself. The 45-piece orchestra was conducted by respected trumpeter, Prince Lengoasa. On National Heritage Day it was staged at the Linder Auditorium in Parktown and on 28 September played at the annual MACUFE in Bloemfontein. The show was made available on CD and DVD. According to the foundation’s CEO, Oupa Selemane, the concept aims to showcase the diversity of musical talent in the industry. Themba is also a Metro FM Awards winner. In 2006 he released a 14-track album featuring songs from his three albums aptly titled *The Collection*. 
His son, Afrika, is also a keyboardist who worked with groups like the Moss Mogale Unit.

The Cato Manor-born Sipho Gumede who died at the age of 53 on 26 July 2004 owned a recording studio in Durban. He released more albums than the other members in his solo career including Faces And Places; Blues For My Mother (SAMA 5 nomination); Peacocks Today, Feather Dusters Tomorrow; New Era; Down Freedom Avenue and 20 Years Of Life. He also released compilation CDs like The Best Of Sipho Gumede. As early as the mid-seventies Pops Mohamed invited him and the late Basil Coetzee to record Pops’s debut album Black Disco on As-Sham label. There was so much demand for another Black Disco album that Sipho and Pops released five more albums under the logo. Sipho, Pops and Basil were members of Movement In The City, a band that released Black Teardrops, which was produced by Rashid Vally through Gallo Records in 1981. Other members of the band were Robbie Jansen, Roger Harry, Monty Weber and Richard Peters.

By 1984 Sipho had released a solo single, Kingo, on Priority Records’ Reaction label and formed the group, Peace. In the early nineties together with Pops they released Kalamazoo featuring Mzi Khumalo on saxophone and Ian Herman of Tananas on drums. Sheer Sound director Damon Forbes supported the concept and Kalamazoo 2 and 3 followed. In 2003 Kalamazoo 4 was released featuring new blood: Xoli Nkosi on keyboards, Moses Khumalo on saxophones and Thabo Mashishi on trumpet under the subtitle “New Crossings”. Gumede’s 1996 album Ubuntu-Humanity was nominated in three categories of the 3rd annual SAMA: Best Adult Contemporary Performance, Best Contemporary Jazz and Best Producer categories. He was nominated as Best Producer for his album New Era in SAMA 7. Sipho was also part of a stable band called Sheer All Stars consisting of Paul Hanmer (piano), McCoy Mrubata (saxophone), Errol Dyers (guitar), Frank Paco (drums) and Sipho himself on bass guitar. Part two of his CD and DVD, Best Of Sipho Gumede compilation was released in July 2005. Like most stars he had his own Afro-jazz band called Jika. One year after his death, his tombstone was unveiled at Stellarwood Cemetery in Durban on 6 August 2005.

By the way, in 2004 Sakhile released a reunion album, Togetherness, just before Sipho passed on. They were nominated for SAMA 11’s Best South African Traditional Jazz Album as well as Best Duo Or Group categories. Sipho was posthumously nominated in the same awards for his album African Sunrise in the Best African Contemporary Adult Album and Best Male Artist categories.

The Afro-jazz combo Sipho formed in 1984 called Peace consisted of Sipho Gumede (eight string bass, acoustic bass, percussion and vocals); Jabu Nkosi (keyboards and synthisisers); Nelson Magwaza (percussion and drums); Bheki Khoza (guitar) and Thembi Mtshali (lead vocals). They released a self-titled album. Drummer Nelson Magwaza died on 14 April 1984 after a short illness. Nelson who was born in Umlazi, Durban went professional in 1965 and joined bands like Heshoo Beshoo whose members included guitarist Cyril Magubane
and saxophonist Henry Sithole. Nelson also played in musicals like *Phiri, Isintu* and *How Long?* From 1973 to 1983 Nelson was a member of the combo, The Drive. He had just joined Peace when he died.

In the early eighties there was another powerful group, *Spirits Rejoice* led by tenor saxophonist, the late Duke Makasi. Some of the members of the group included young Khaya Mahlangu as well as Lulu Gontsana. Saxman and producer Duke who was a member of The Drive at one stage will be remembered for his albums like *Arise And Shine* (Vulindlela, 1984). It featured tracks like Zacks Nkosi’s composition, *Hellfire*. It was produced by Greg Cutler and Sipho Gumede. I still remember that RPM released it simultaneously with Lionel Martin Pillay’s *October Magic*. That year Duke’s release was voted the Best Jazz/Fusion Album in South Africa, while Pillay was voted the Best Fusion Artist. Some of the musicians Duke worked closely with included the great drummer, Louis Moholo.

In the neighbouring mountain kingdom of Morena Moshoeshoe and Morena Letsie three guys formed a band in the year of the storm, 1976, and gave it a name associated with the total freedom that Africans were longing for – *Uhuru*. It might interest you to know that one of the high-life bands that used to accompany President Kwame Nkrumah on his road shows in Ghana was known as Uhuru Dance Band. The original members of the Lesotho band were Frank Moki Leepa, Maruti Selate and Moss Nkofe. Later they were joined by the son of a Tyatyaneng preacherman who sang in church halls with his family choir, Tsepo Tshola. Tsepo who had also played with groups like Blue Diamonds joined the band through Frank Leepa.

In 1979 they toured South Africa but the authorities cut short their performances and ordered them to leave the country and never to return, without furnishing them with reasons. I guess the authorities saw them as “bad elements”. This move frustrated their efforts to record music with South Africa’s record companies. They disbanded in 1981, and in 1983 lead vocalist Tsepo Mobu Tshola went to work with Hugh Masekela’s Kalahari (formerly Mother) based in Botswana. The entertainment industry in Lesotho was placed on shaky ground following the 1982 attack of civilians in that former “protectorate” by the forces of apartheid South Africa. Later Frank Leepa and Moss Nkofe formed a new band and called it *Sankomota*. When Maruti returned from his studies in Europe he rejoined the two and they recorded their debut album *Dreams Do Come True*, which featured the hit *Now Or Never*. From there they released other albums with Tsepo who also returned to the band. While in London with Hugh Masekela, Tshola met Julian Bahula who encouraged him to bring Sankomota to England. Subsequently, Sankomota stayed for a long time in England performing and developing their product. Some of their albums are *The Writing’s On The Wall* (1989) featuring Tsepo’s composition, *Papa*, and *Exploration – A New Phase* (1991) featuring yet another Tshola composition, *Stop*.
The song was unofficially launched at a festival I attended at Ellis Park stadium. Tsepo asked all of us to sing the chorus and as we were sick and tired of the political violence, the whole stadium roared with the outcry, “Stop the war!” After that Tsepo embarked on a solo career. Later the band’s stability was shattered by a tragic road accident that claimed the lives of some of its members. In 1993 Sankomota released After The Storm featuring the hit Afrika with all songs written by Frank Leepa as if signing off from a career to which he had dedicated himself for many years. One of their memorable shows on the continent was organised by the Kenyan promoter, Tamokati Ndongala in Nairobi. At the time the band members were Frank Leepa, Richard Sekgobela, Tsepiso Mpotle, Sello Montoedi, Joel Matsela and Khaya Dlamini. Their backing vocals and dancing team was made up of Sharon Dee, Nozipho Nguse and Joyce Skefu who was later to be the star of a tshiVenda SABC 2 television serial drama, Muvhango, liked for her favourite phrase, “You must never!” Later on Joyce played the role of “Maletsatsi” in e-tv’s soapie, Scandal.

Tsepo Tshola embarked on a solo career releasing albums like Let’s Hold Hands (1994) and Nothing Can Beat The Truth (1995). His inclination towards gospel music earned him the name, “The Village Pope”. His 2002 album 2 New Dawn was nominated in SAMA 9’s Best Producer and Best Engineer categories. The album was co-produced by the “Time Trio” – Hugh Masekela, Khaya Mahlangu and Blondie Makhene; Richard Mitchell was the engineer. Tsepo’s unique rich gravel voice is so in demand that he was invited to do duets with several musicians including Rebecca Malope, PJ Powers and the late Brenda Fassie. In fact it appears that there was just something special about the Uhuru/Sankomota connection – Tsepo Tshola, Nana Motijoane, Tshepiso Mpotle and Frank Leepa all had rich heavy voices. In 2005 Tsepo released, Winding Rivers And Waterfalls with a strong line-up of musicians who included Khaya Mahlangu, Zwai Bala, Hugh Masekela, Fana Zulu, Themba Mokoena and Lawrance Matshiza. In December 2006, Tsepo was made an honorary bishop by the AME Church of Africa.

Tenor saxophonist, Bhudaza Mapefane from Hlotse is a humble star who received his music education at Mmabana Cultural Centre in 1987/88 and was with Sankomota between 1989 and 1992. He left the band when Tsepo and Frank went their separate ways. After assisting Tsepo on his 1994 CD, he worked with musicians like Lucky Dube. After the death of his mentor and brother Mochoko in a car-crash in 2001, he released his debut album titled Bo-Mapefane (Universal Music, 2003). It was produced by “Captain” Frank Moki Leepa just before his departure and sold over 300 000 units featuring hits like Lekhokhoma and Tjontjobina. The UCT graduate became a frequent feature at music festivals across the country. His follow-up CD was Mohokare (2006), named after the Caledon River, which forms the boundary between Lesotho and South Africa.

Tshepiso Mpotle had a stint with Sankomota as a lead singer. He was born in Maokeng near Kroonstad and started singing with local groups like The Echoes.
and Kroonstad Red Lions. He was introduced to the broader music industry by William Mthethwa through his band Young Five in 1992. His albums include *Volkstad* and *Lengolo*. His gospel albums include a duet with fellow musician Keketso Phoofolo titled *Konyana* (2006).

**Tananas** was formed in 1987 by three musicians: Steve Newman (guitar), Gito Baloi (bass guitar) and Ian Herman (drums). Gito, son of Serafirm Baloi (1937–2000), was born in Mozambique and arrived in South Africa in 1986. The group’s kind of multicultural sound that blended jazz, Mozambican Salsa, ragtime, Spanish and township jive so well could only be defined as rainbow music. In those days many record companies were still too rigid to record this strange sound. An independent label called Shifty Records gave them a chance in 1988 when it recorded their self-titled album. In 1990 they moved to Gallo Records where they released *Spiral* (1990) and *Time* (1992). By 1993 the pressures of showbiz became unbearable and the band split. Ian Herman went to the US, Steve Newman did his own projects with the likes of Tony Cox while Gito Baloi embarked on a solo career. In his solo career Gito released these albums: *Ekaya* (1995), *Na Ku Randza* (1997) and *Herbs & Roots* (2001) self-written/produced and released by Sheer Sound. He’ll always be remembered for moving songs like *Hinkwalo*. In 1994 Ian Herman and Steve Newman tried to revive the group but Gito was too involved in his flourishing solo career. The two went on using the name Tananas (Wide Ensemble), which created a family environment whereby different musicians like Vusi Mahlasela could do some projects with them. In 1994 they released *Orchestra Mundo*, which won them FNB SAMA 1’s Best Jazz Performance category. Their 1996 release, *Unamunacua* was nominated for FNB SAMA 3’s Best Producer category. It won the Best Contemporary Jazz Performance and Best Engineer sections. After that Ian went back to the US to settle in San Francisco, but in 1998 Steve re-united the band with Gito successfully. They released their sixth album, *Seed* and promoted it through their participation in 2000 WOMAD (World of Music, Arts and Dance). Their other albums were *The Collection* (1997) as well as *Alive In Jo’burg* (2001). In the US Ian worked with the likes of Matt Venuti and the jazz band, Junk. Steve continued to work with Tony Cox even performing in night clubs. You’ll certainly remember Tony for his album *Cool Friction*, which contested the 1997 FNB SAMA’s Best Instrumental Performance category with Tessa Ziegler’s *Late Afternoon At The Road Café* and the Soweto String Quartet’s *Renaissance*. Tony won the category for *Matebele Ants* in SAMA 7 and in SAMA 9 for *China*. His collaboration with Steve Newman, *About Time* was nominated SAMA 9’s Best Duo or Group. Once again in 2007 he won MTN SAMA 14’s Best Instrumental Album category for *Blue Anthem*.

**Gito Baloi** died in a tragic robbery incident on 4 April 2004 (444) at the age of 39 in Johannesburg on his way home from his show in Tshwane. I called his house that morning whereupon we agreed I should send the few lines I wrote...
after hearing the news of the passing away of this great musician on the radio. These are the lines:

**SONG FOR GITO**

G for greatness
I for intelligence
T for talent
O for oracle.

B is black
A is African
L is liberated
O is Original
I is inspiration

So in love with your gita Gito,
African sounds from Maputo.
Started playing for bananas,
Graduated into Tananas.

Eloquent and prolific man,
Harmless, humble, handsome and human.
Shared your genius with Steve Newman,
Ruled the stage with Ian Herman.

The nightclubs are poorer without you,
This Friday is no good without you.
Though yours was known as World music,
To me it was African magic.

Gito Baloi “Na ku randza”
“Herbs and roots” your last stanza.
“Ekaya” spread a message of peace,
I pray for you to rest in peace.

I was pleased in 2007 when in a television interview Dave of Grassroot mentioned their intention to release Gito’s unknown work. The group that includes Louis Mhlanga and Concord Nkabinde used to jam with the late guitar maestro.

A project that now and then reminds me of Gito’s sound is Abe Sibiya’s Live Culture. The album titled *A Man, A Boy And A Girl* (Melodi Music) which features a nostalgic track, *Inkomo Zikababa*, was nominated in SAMA 7’s Best
Producer category. All the songs were composed, arranged and produced by Abe who also played piano and synthesiser. The label was co-owned by former Tusk Music executives Kgomotso More and Ali Mpofu. Ali’s company, Ukhamba Productions, later produced the television choral music programme, Imizwili.

MalaiKa’s self-titled 2003 debut CD sold over 400 000 sales units. It was produced by Guffy Pilane who also became their manager. The trio was made up of Jabulani Ndaba, Bongani Nchang and Tsheddi Mholo. Jabu and Bongani who were from Klerksdorp, North West Province released a CD in 2000 as a group called Stouters, but it did not register any success. The two were conductors of a church gospel group at the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Meadowlands. The choir’s lead vocalist, Matshediso Florence Mholo, was born on 27 September 1976 in Boikhutsong, Lichtenberg. The 1995 Shell Road To Fame national finalist graduated at Unibo in 1999. The former lady teacher joined the two. The group won the MTN SAMA 11’s Best Selling Album category for the CD, MalaiKa. Their other accolades include the Metro FM Music Awards’ Best Group Of The Year, the Kora All Africa Music Awards’ Revelation Of The Year and the Best African Group. Their hits included Mhla Uphela Amandla, Sebakanyana and the cross-over Destiny, which won the 2005 Channel O African Music Video Awards’ Best African Pop category. They followed up with Vuthelani (2005) and were nominated Kora All Africa Music Awards’ Best Group: Southern Africa. The album also won SAMA 12’s Best African Pop Album category. MalaiKa won the Best Duo Or Group category of the 2006 Channel O Spirit of Africa Music Video Awards for 2 Bob. In 2007 the group released the CD Sekunjalo, featuring the late Jabu Khanyile on the track Kiss Kiss. Its demand saw them tour countries like the UK and Canada. The CD won SAMA 14’s Best African Pop Album category. Sadly, Jabulani Harold Ndaba who was born in Heilbron, Free State on 4 October 1976 died on 14 July 2008 at Tshepong Hospital, Klerksdorp after a long illness. The singer, composer, songwriter and producer known as “Sjava” was laid to rest at the Klerksdorp Cemetery on 19 July 2008.

Another group in this category is the Bloemfontein quartet, Kaya. Their debut CD Kunzima featured hits like Sthandwa. They were nominated in Metro FM Music Awards 2005’s Best African Pop category and won the Best Newcomer category, which was also contested by Kwani Experience and T’Zozo & Professor.

The above two groups entered a market that was already created by Mafikizolo, another “back to roots” Afro-Pop group fronted by Schweizer-Reneke born Nonhlanhla Sibongile Nciza (née Mafu). The name of the group was inspired by a Theo Kgosinkwe composition, Mafikizolo. When he handed the song to producer Oscar Mdlongwa of Kalawa as a demo, the producer though, that would be a winning name for a group. Theo is a composer of repute who has written songs for the likes of Busi Mhlongo and Hugh Masekela. Jacob Mafu’s daughter, Nhlanhla who later married Thembinkosi “TK” Nciza of TS
Records, grew up in Kagiso. She attempted a music degree at Wits University. The other members of the group are Theo Kgosinkwe and the late Tebogo Tebza Madingoane who left us tragically on the morning of Valentine’s Day 2004. Today Mafikizolo’s hits include Ndihamba Nawe, Sibongile, Emlanjeni, Gugo’ Thandayo and Nisixoshelani which always reminded me of Baltimora’s Tarzanboy. Their awards include The Cell C For Yourself Award (Metro Awards 2002), SAMA 8’s Best African Pop Album and Best Group categories as well as SAMA 10’s Best Duo Or Group for their album Kwela. Their albums include Mafikizolo (1997), Music Revolution (1998), Gate Crusher (2000), Sibongile (2002), Kwela (2003), Van Toeka Af (2004) and Tribute To Tebza (2004). In 2005 they were nominated Best Group: southern Africa in the 10th Kora All Africa Music Awards. Their 2006 release, Six Mabone (nominated in six categories) won the Best Duo/Group and Best Pop Album: African categories of the SAMA 13. Mafikizolo also won the Best Compilation DVD category for The Hits. The group continued to work with the Dangerous Combination Crew (DCC) and by 2007 they had released a DVD, The Journey, The Hits.

In 2006 the lead singer Nhlanhlana Nciza was released by Mafikizolo’s company Kalawa Jazmee to record her debut solo CD with her hubby’s TS Records. Even before the release of the 14-track album, Zinathi’s mom disclosed that she was working with the masters of the game like Nana Coyote, Sipho Mbele, Theo as well as songwriters Robbie Malinga and Mojalefa Thebe. The result was her CD Inguquko (2007), which hit the gold disc mark in September of that year. The cherry on top was the launch of her own clothing range, the NN Vintage as well as the signing of a deal to become the new face of hair product, Sunsilk.

Ntando Bangani was born in Bushbuckridge and raised in the Eastern Cape and Gauteng. While attending music classes at Manu Technical College with his Kagiso homegirl Nhlanhlana Nciza (née Mafu), she introduced him to TS Records. He released his debut album, Kwantu, featuring the hit Bendingazi. It sold over 50 000 units and was nominated for the Best African Pop category of SAMA 11. His second album, Imvelaphi-Heritage, was produced by Robbie Malinga. It dominated the 2005 Metro FM Awards nomination list by featuring in the Best African Pop, Best Album, Best Male and Best Song (Dali Wam) categories. Ntando won in all the categories. The awards were staged in Port Elizabeth on 26 November. In SAMA 12 he scooped both the Most Popular Song of the Year as well as the Most Popular Artist of the Year categories. Like Ringo Madlingozi, his music reflects his roots. After leaving TS Records in 2007 he released the album Uhambo Lwam (EMI/Born Fire).

Kutu is a four-man band led by Oupa Lebogo. Oupa is the general secretary of the Creative Workers Union Of South Africa (CWUSA), a position he also held in the former musicians only union, Musicians Union Of South Africa (MUSA). The actual meaning of the word kutu, is the stem of a tree that joins the roots to the branches; it is the main line of a family or race. The members of
the band are Oupa Lebogo, Philip Boikanyo, Ephraim Mothoa and Patrick. Their 1996 debut album, *Majakathata*, featured tracks *Nthoena*, *Badisi* and the title track. In 1998 they released *Melodi*, which featured the tracks *Tlaki* and *Chuchu* on the Gallo Records label. It was followed by *In The Ghetto* (2000) produced by Thapelo Khomo featuring tracks like *Inyaka Nyaka* and *Motintinyana* as well as the title track that promoted children’s rights. Guest artists on the album include Godfrey Mgcina, Sello Montwedi, Nana Motijoane, Sidwell O’Neil, Isaac Mtshali, Khaya Dlamini, Bheki Luthuli, Sipho Madondo as well as Thapelo Khomo himself. Backing vocalists were Khanyo Maphumulo, Beaulah Hashe and Max Mtambo.

**Charm** was a group whose members included Mike Petlele and Bassie Chose. They released an album titled *Kwela-Kwela*, produced by Kenny Mathaba in association with Afro Pop Productions on RPM’s Africa label. The music was co-written by Kenny Mathaba, Johnny Mokhali, Mike Petlele and Bassie Chose. Humphrey Mabote and Peter Pearlson were the RPM Studio engineers.

**Afrika** was another four-man band that released a self-titled album in 1987 on the RPM label. The album was produced by Peter Moticoe and engineered by Sam Wingate. The music was written by the band members L. Langa, A. Mmotong, M. Mahlangu and S. Dlamba. It featured the track *Ya Memeza I-Afrika*.

In 1986 Tom “Bishop” Mkhize produced and arranged the music of **African Image**’s album *Reality* on the CTV - Music Team’s Spinna label. The music was composed by Tom Mkhize and Neville Nash featuring the tracks *The Way I Feel* and *From The Roots*.

Ndixolele Mbali was born on 6 February 1976 and grew up in Eziphunzana township, East London in the Eastern Cape. His mother was a vocalist and pianist. A self-taught guitarist, he registered for music courses at the East London Technical College. In 1997 the former Cambridge High School student left Duncan Village for Johannesburg. Together with homeboy Mxolisi Lokwe aka MxO they formed a group called Roots 2000. In 2003 he released a self-titled debut album featuring the hit *Amantongomane* using the name SLIQ ANGEL. He followed up with CDs like *Sunrise* (2005) and *Isizalo* (2008). Sliq, who plays guitar, drums, sax, bass guitar and clarinet described his music as “soul-funk”.

Mxolisi Lokwe aka **MxO** was born on 20 November 1978 in Zwide, Port Elizabeth, and grew up at Kwa-Dwesi near East London. He was schooled in Uitenhage and completed his matric at Woolhope in Malabar. His music career developed as he played with local groups like Black Power Crew and Lil’ Homies. In 1999 he left Port Elizabeth for Johannesburg. After working in a music shop, he joined Unity Records and did gigs at venues like the Bassline and Horror Café. This is where he met Sliq Angel to form Roots 2000, which took the live music scene by storm. Having played for Jungle Connection in Yeoville, they each went solo, with MxO releasing his debut album *Peace Of Mind* (2003) produced by Afrika Mkhize and featuring tracks like *Zandy bone* and *Green Leaves*. The album
was nominated in the Best Male category of MTN SAMA 11. His recording label is called MLOK Records. This talented artist released his follow-up CD in 2006 titled *MX-Funk*, a name that also defined his music genre.

From Queenstown, **Camagu Siyabulela Mabuya** released his debut album *Uhambo* (2005) after struggling for 11 years to get a recording deal. Son of a drumming vocalist, he trained at Natal Technikon. He describes his music genre as African soul.

**Choppa** was born Robert Muluana in Maputo, Mozambique. Though he trained as an electric engineer, his passion for music led him into the world of showbiz where he became a composer, singer, choreographer and dancer. He took the local music scene by storm with his cross-over sounds blending Brazilian, Spanish and African rhythms to bring out dance floor hits like *Margarida*. His albums include *Batukeiro* (2000), *Omunye Nomunye* (2001) and *Waga Waga*.

**Neo Muyanga** who was born in Soweto came to my attention performing his beautiful ballad, *My World*, which became a signature tune to the first series of SABC television’s hit programme *All You Need Is Love* hosted by Hlomla Dandala. This keyboardist had been busy with duo BLK Sonshine (with Masauko Chipembere), which released a self-titled CD. Some of their best tracks are *Born In A Taxi*, *Crazy* and *Building*. The Afro-fusion musician later moved to Cape Town for better inspiration. Neo Muyanga later released his debut solo work *The Listening Room*, an album he worked on while researching the music of the Muyanga people of Mozambique. This beautiful musician also featured in film maker Bev Ditsie’s documentary on the Blondie Makhene family, which was broadcast on SABC television on 8 August 2005.

**Khumbula** is a group whose nucleus is former members of Lucky Dube’s backing band. They are Skipper Shabalala (vocals/guitar), Msizi “Chunky” Mashiyane (guitar), Bheki Masina (bass) and Andile Nqubezelo (drums). They caught my attention when they set dance floors ablaze with their CD *Bayakhuluma*. Theirs is a fusion of traditional maskandi guitars and deep African rhythms. Their follow-up CD *Khetha* did not disappoint their fans.

**Bow & Arrow** is a band made up of a pool of experiences from various bands like Labantu, All Rounders, African Herbs and The Soul Brothers. The members are Thami Sobekwa (vocals), Theko Masiteng (drums), David Prentjies (bass guitar), Tikkie Chaka (trumpet), Jele Mqikela (trombone), Nhlalha Oliphant (saxophone) and Michael Skosana (keyboards). Their debut album, *Lena Lefatshe*, was released through Bula Music in 2005.

**Jimmy Mngwandi** who co-wrote the hit *Chico* for his group Image in 1985 has played with many musicians both on stage and record. By 2005 he was member of a trio called Bazwaana whose other members are Adam Howard and Bez Roberts from the UK. They released a CD called *Newtown Breeze*.

I thought I was dreaming in 2002 when someone from the music industry told me about a new CD by Herman Fox. After clarification I discovered that
he was talking about **Herman “Fox” Manganyi**. Hermann’s CD turned out to be *Tsakane*, a powerful rendition of iTsonga lyrics wrapped in the Afro-pop sound. It was produced and engineered by Don Laka at his Lakdon Studios, with lyrics written by Herman and music by Don. It is part of Don Laka’s Bokone Music catalogue.

**Mina Nawe**, a young and vibrant Afro-pop trio from Daveyton, introduced itself to the music industry with the debut CD titled *Njalo*. The members of the group managed by Isaac Masia of Masia Sound Productions are Carlo “Nutti” Mpanza, Zanele “Mazet” Masemola and Candid “Manchild” Shaw. They were crowned Best Newcomer by the 2005 Channel O African Music Video Awards for their video *Le Ngoma*. In 2006 their platinum-status CD saw them nominated again for the same awards in the Best Collaboration Video category. Their popularity sent them touring African states like Zimbabwe, Nigeria and Tanzania. Their follow-up CD was titled *Stronger* (Sheer Sound).

**Malini** is a duo made up of Toffo Goge and M’du Ntombela. The lass and lad met while backing Rebecca Malope and Vuyo Mokoena. The group’s name was inspired by the question they were always asked upon request of their services – “How much?” Their 2004 debut CD was titled *Basilindile*. It was followed by *Inkinka* (2006) and *Jikelele* (2007).

The only child in a family that had lost many siblings before they could see this world, **Lesego Reetsang** from Kanana location, Klerksdorp in the North West is a rising Afro-soul artist. It took him ten years before he could release his debut CD aptly titled *My Music* (2006). His partnership with his childhood friends, Jaziel Brothers (Luthando and Ntobeko Ngcizela) in producing the album really paid off handsomely. It received three SAMA 13 nominations. His fans will tell you that you haven’t seen anything yet until you experience his stage performances. As for the producers Jaziel Brothers who had also worked with the likes of Jub-Jub Maarohanye and Kelly Khumalo, by 2008 they were the toast of live music festivals promoting their CD, *The Beginning*.

**Siphokazi Maraqana** was born on 9 September 1977 and grew up at Jambeni village in Lusikisiki, Eastern Cape. She was brought up by her staunch Christian granny. After singing with a local gospel group, in 1999 at the age of 22 she went to Johannesburg and stayed in KwaThema, Springs for a while before moving into the innercity of Jozi. She received formal music education at the Sibikwa Community Theatre Project. The National Arts Council offered her a bursary to study Music Technology at East Side College (Parktown College). It was here that she met a teacher who greatly motivated her – guitarist Bheki Khoza. In 2001 she flew out to Japan with college friend Musa Mhlongo, who was invited to perform at a cultural exchange concert. After performing in front of the Japanese crowd, the Afro-soul star who mentions Busi Mhlongo and Stevie Wonder as her inspiration has travelled the world as a backing vocalist for musicians like Tsepo Tshola, Pat Matshikiza, Ringo Mdlangozi, Stimela, Zamajobe.
and Simphiwe Dana. Many of us first heard her voice on Pat Matshikiza’s CD *Seasons, Masks and Keys* as she sang *Vula Mama*. In 2006 she released her debut CD *Ubuntu Bam* through Sipho Sithole’s Native Rhythms label. She co-wrote some tracks with songwriter friend Musa Mhlongo for the CD that was produced by guitarist Lawrance Matshiza. The musicians line-up boasted the who’s who in SA music. Five SAMA nominations including Best Producer, as well as her inclusion on the Cape Town International Jazz Festival line-up can mean only one thing from the music industry – confidence! She was crowned Best Newcomer by SAMA 13 and won the Best Adult Contemporary Album: African category. She went on to win the 8th Metro FM Music Awards’ three categories: Best Female Vocalist, Best Newcomer and Best Produced Album. If you ask me, my favourite track on the CD is *Amacala*.

**Camagwini** was born Siphokazi Buti in New Brighton, Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape. Like Marqana she was raised by her granny. She loved music from a young age, although choirmasters at school disliked her way of singing. Her inspiration came from musicians like Suthukazi Arosi, Tu Nokwe and Dorothy Masuka, but her real heroine was “the urban Zulu”, Busi Mhlongo. The Afro-soul singer left her home for Johannesburg in 2006 at the age of 24. Her musical home became Sipho Sithole’s Native Rhythms Records. Camagwini’s debut album *Zivile* (2007) was nominated for SAMA 14’s Best African Album and Best Newcomer categories. The latter category was won by EMI South Africa’s Tasha Baxter who also scooped the Best Pop Album: English category for *Colour of Me*.

There’s also the young **Mathapelo Masilela** whose rich voice promises to enrich and widen the scope of Afro-pop. Her album Sthandwa Sami was well-received by music lovers and she became a jewel at live concerts.

Soweto-born **Tebogo Phume** entered the music field as a keyboardist in his family church choir. At the age of 14 the talented musician who grew up in the Vaal Triangle formed his own group, The Mighty. He later became drummer and lead vocalist for a Sharpeville-based group, Mac Jay’s. Among other institutions Tebogo sharpened his skills at FUBA School of Music, Johannesburg, and the University of Cape Town, where he formed the band Mozania. He later joined Kgoagelo Mailula’s Kgalala as well as Cuba Groove. In 2006 the Jazz Programme graduate released his CD titled *Gola o Di Bone* (Phela Re Phele Music Productions).