CHAPTER FIFTEEN
EXILE BLUES

In the early fifties Alf Herbert launched the most revolutionary concept to ever hit the local music industry – African Jazz Revue And Variety Show. It gave local stars a taste of broader exposure, recognition and professionalism preparing them for bigger challenges to come. Thereafter followed the release of a jazz album series titled Township Jazz. Later musicals like Todd Matshikiza’s King Kong, Alan Paton’s Sponono, Bertha Egnos’s Ipi Tombi and Welcome Msomi’s Umabatha played a very important role in both the political and cultural struggles of South Africa. Most of our senior jazz and blues musicians used these shows as springboards from which they launched their international careers. They also used their musical muscle to make the world aware about the evils of apartheid. Thankfully, Welcome Msomi was honoured with a Naledi Lifetime Achievement Award in February 2008.

The first black African woman to win a Grammy Award, Zenzile Miriam Makeba, was born on 4 March 1932 in Prospect Township, Johannesburg. She grew up in Nelspruit, Mpumalanga Province and later moved to Riverside near Pretoria. Her father died when she was six years old. Her mother, Christina Nomkomondelo Jele was a traditional healer. Miriam who started singing in church choirs later sang for groups like the Brooklyn Boys and it was while singing for The Cuban Brothers that she was spotted by Alan Silinga who later composed songs for her female group, The Skylarks. Alan was one of South Africa’s best composers whose work include Ntyilo Ntyilo and Holilili. Alan was born in Baziya on 9 September 1920. His compositions were registered only in the nineties. The great composer sadly passed away at the age of 86 on Tuesday, 4 September 2007, and buried on Saturday, 15 September at Ekhayeni Bhaziya, Mthata, in the Eastern Cape Province.
Although the line-up changed with times, the other members of The Skylarks who were originally called The Sunbeams were Mummy Girl Nkettle, Mary Rabotapi and Helen van Rensburg. Later Abigail Khubeka from Jabavu replaced Helen. Their band consisted of Dan Hill (clarinet), General Duze (guitar), Dannyboy Sibanyoni (bass) and Norman Martin (drums). Among the female groups in their league at the time were The Quad Sisters. Miriam was asked by Nathan Dambuza Mdledle to join his Manhattan Brothers, a mbube group originally called the Joburg Boys. Upon filling the position left open by Emily Kwenane, she rose to prominence with the Sophiatown group. Its members were Ronnie Sehume, Joseph Mogotsi, Rufus Khoza and Dambuza Mdledle. In 1956 their hit, *Lovely Lies* composed by Mackay Davashe and led by Miriam entered the Billboard Top 100.

In 1957 Makeba was lead singer in Alfred Herbert’s African Jazz Revue And Variety Show, which toured Africa for eighteen months. Later both Mdledle and Miriam played the lead roles in the jazz musical, *King Kong*, which was adapted from a book by lawyer, Harry Bloom. The story is based on the life of that Vryheid-born champion boxer, Mandlenkosi Ezekiel Dlamini. True to his colourful career Dlamini boasted names like the “Spice Smasher”, “King Marshal” and “Lightning Marshal”, but shocked the nation when he ended his own life by throwing himself into a dam in the Rivonia river. The show’s musical director was Sol Klaaste. Members of The King Kong Band included Sylvester ‘Skip’ Phahlane, Stanley Glasser, Mackay Davashe, Jonas Gwangwa, Hugh Masekela, Gwigwi Mrwebi, General Duze, Kippie Moeketsi and Lemmy Mabaso. Abigail Khubeka, who also played in the opera, replaced Miriam in the leading role when she suddenly fell ill. The musical was composed by Todd Matshikiza. Later following the popularity of Lionel Rogosin’s documentary film *Come Back Africa* in which she appeared singing in a shebeen, Makeba left South Africa in November 1959 after the release of her big hit, *Miriam’s Goodbye To Africa*. Abigail played her role in *King Kong*.

The music scene of Makeba’s era was shown in a Pascale Lamche television documentary *Sophiatown*, which was broadcast by SABC 1 on Heritage Day, 24 September 2005. Most of her early work was under the guidance of US actor, composer and recording artist, Harry Belafonte and she had many concerts and recordings, some of which have been broadcast only recently in the new South Africa as they were previously too hot to handle. One of those is her 1966 Swedish Tour with members of her band: Leopoldo Fleming Jr (congas), William Salter (bass) and Sivuca (guitar/accordion). Among her early international successes was her Jonas Gwangwa-produced/arranged album, *An Evening With Harry Belafonte And Miriam Makeba*, which won her a Grammy Award. It was unbelievable that only six years after she had left her motherland she’d scooped the coveted award in early 1965. The influence of the fiery lady of song was realised by the whole world when she addressed the General Assembly of the
United Nations on 16 July 1963. This revealed that she was not only a singer, but also a human rights campaigner.

Makeba’s hits include *Pata Pata*, *Oxgam* (*Click Song No. 2*), *Malaika*, *Welela*, *Hapo Zamani*, *Amampondo*, *West Wind*, *Mas Que Nada*, *Mama Ndiyalila*, *A Promise* and *Gauteng*. In her recordings she worked with many other established compatriots like Morris Goldberg as well as younger ones at home. Her former husbands include fellow musician Hugh Masekela and Stokely Carmichael, a political activist who renamed himself Kwame Toure in honour of two of Africa’s great leaders. It may interest some readers to note that though her album *Country Girl* was recorded in Kumasi, it was completed in New York with some members of Ipi Tombi. Some of them like Julia Mathunjwa, Betty Hlela and Nomsc Caluza formed a group called Shikisha. However, some members of Sponono enriched Hugh’s newly-formed production company, Oo-Bwana. That’s how effective the exile network was.

On her return to South Africa, Mama Afrika who was once hosted by friend and confidante, Sekou Toure of Guinea for years on the continent was appointed by the new government as South Africa’s ambassador to the rest of Africa. Her welcome concert at Johannesburg’s Standard Bank Arena was testimony of her popularity in the country of her birth. In recognition of her commitment and contribution to music and the liberation struggle she was honoured with a doctorate degree. The continent’s premier music awards, the Koras honoured her with a Lifetime Achievement Award in 1996. Her 2000 release *Homeland* produced by Cedric Samson won her SAMA 7’s Best Female Artist and Best Adult Contemporary African Album categories. The 2003 CD *Reflections* won SAMA 10’s Best Adult Contemporary Album and Best Jazz Vocal Album categories. Makeba also won the awards’ Best DVD section for Live at Bern’s Salonger, Stockholm, Sweden, 1966. She went on to win the Best African Arrangement category of the Kora All Africa Music Awards. As if that was not enough, it was also nominated in the Grammy Awards.

To honour her life of commitment to the struggle through music, on 29 July 2005 her admirer and producer of her Welela album, Sipho Mabuse organised an event dubbed “Tribute To Miriam Makeba” at Midrand’s Gallagher Estate. A well-deserved honour for the lady who once served as Ghanaian delegate to the United Nations and won the Hammarskjöld Peace Prize in 1986. In November 2005 she received the Metro FM Special Award at the national commercial radio station’s music awards staged at King’s Beach in Port Elizabeth. She also blessed various prestigious functions like the 1999 African Pride Award and the 2002 Woman Of The Year Awards. A true international, she blessed long time admirer and Indian pop singer, Usha Uthup’s 1995 show at the Patidar Theatre in Lenasia just before embarking on her European tour. Some of her humanitarian works include the Makeba Centre For Girls in Midrand. The full story of Bongi’s mother who has a career spanning over fifty years is in books.
like *Makeba, My Story* and Nomsa Mwamuka’s *Makeba – The Miriam Makeba Story*. She also featured in *Nightingales And Nice-time Girls*. In 2005 when I learned that the star whose career highlights include performing in front of kings and queens had announced her retirement from public performances at the age of 73, I remembered how the apartheid government once tried to dwarf her by banning her music. Some fires are just too strong, even for the fire-brigade. She went on to release her album *Makeba Forever* and embarked on a world tour of 50 countries as part of her farewell concerts. On 1 September 2006 the Miriam Makeba Centre For Performing Arts was launched in her honour at the University of Fort Hare in Alice, Eastern Cape. The ambassador of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation whose local inspiration remains Dolly Rathebe, says as long as she can breathe she’ll continue singing.

Some of Miriam Makeba’s albums:

- 1957–59 *Miriam Makeba And The Skylarks*
- 1960 *Miriam Makeba*
- 1962 *The World Of Miriam Makeba*
- 1962 *The Many Voices of Miriam Makeba*
- 1963 *Makeba*
- 1964 *The Voice Of Africa*
- 1965 *Makeba Sings*
- 1965 *The Click Song*
- 1965 *An Evening with Harry Belafonte and Miriam Makeba*
- 1966 *All About Makeba*
- 1966 *Malaisha*
- 1966 *The Magnificent Miriam Makeba*
- 1974 *A Promise*
- 1975 *Country Girl*
- 1977 *Pata Pata*
- 1977 ‘Live’ For My Brothers And Sisters
- 1979 *Sabelani*
- 1983 *Pata Pata*
- 1988 *Sangoma*
- 1989 *Welela*
- 1989 *Le Monde De Miriam Makeba*
- 1991 *Eyes On Tomorrow*
- 1991 *Africa*
- 1993 *Sing Me A Song*
- 1998 *Live From Paris and Conakry*
- 2000 *Homeland*
- 2001 *The Guinea Years*
- 2002 *Keep Me In Mind*
- 2003 *Reflections*
- 2006 *Makeba Forever*

In 1960 when King Kong toured England, Abigail Khubeka and Mary Rabotapi were part of its cast. On their return they tried to keep the name of The Skylarks alive by roping in singers like Letta Mbulu, but later the group disbanded.
Let’s pause and pay tribute to the genius of **Todd Matshikiza**. He was born into a family of musicians in Queenstown in 1921. Todd who trained as a teacher at Lovedale College became famous as a *Drum!* magazine columnist in the 1950s. Besides the legendary *King Kong* musical his many compositions include *Hamba Kahle Mkhonto*, which was locally “launched” at Chris Hani’s funeral. He also worked with Alan Paton in the sixties on the music for the stage play, “Mkhumbane”. Todd left the turbulent South Africa with his family in 1960 to settle in London. In 1964 he returned to the continent and settled in Zambia. He died in Lusaka in 1968 and was survived by his wife Esmé, daughter Marian and son, John. The music maestro’s son, John who became world-famous for his acting skills in films like *There’s a Zulu on My Stoep* is also a journalist who runs a column “With The Lid Off”, sharing a title with his father. In 2007 John directed a concert titled “A Retrospective Concert: The Life and Times of Todd T Matshikiza”. It premièred at the South African State Theatre on Friday 27 July featuring among others Sibongile Mngoma, Abel Moeng, Denzil Weale, Kutlwano Masote and the Soweto Young Voices. By the way, John’s daughter, Lindiwe is a gifted actress who in 2007 took the theatre scene by surprise in that Mike van Graan one-actor-many-characters play, *Bafana Republic*.

Some musicians who toured London’s West End with *King Kong* stayed there for quite some time while some did not return. Saxophonist Kippie “Morolong” Moeketsi’s health problems forced him to return home. At Johannesburg’s Dorkay House together with musicians Dollar Brand, Hugh Masekela, Jonas Gwangwa, Makhaya Ntshoko and Johnny Gertze they formed The Jazz Epistles, the first black band to record a jazz album in South Africa. The band went on to win the first held Cold Castle Jazz Festival, which was staged in the Johannesburg City Hall in 1961 playing Negro Spirituals in jazz style. This group’s impact between 1959 and 1960 is still felt today and their album *Verse One* (Gallo Records) remains one of the collector’s rare items.

**Hugh Ramapolo Masekela’s** career will always be associated with these four groups: The Union Of South Africa, Hedzoleh Soundz, OJAH and Kalahari. His ancestral paternal roots are in Botlokwa to the north-east of Polokwane in Limpopo Province. Even today many Masekela’s (Bo-Masekela) are found there. The Batlokwa are very proud of their culture, especially their language, Setlokwa. His father, Thomas Selema Masekela was married to Pauline Bowers. Hugh was born on 4 April 1939 at Kwa-Guqa near Witbank (now eMalahleni) where he grew up in his maternal granny’s house. He started school in Payneville, Springs and grew up in Alexandra township, Johannesburg. By 1952 he was a student at St Peter’s Secondary School (now St Martin’s) in Rosettenville. Father Trevor Huddleston and musician schoolmate Stompie Manana motivated him to pay more attention to his music talent. He became one of the founder members of the college band known as the Father Huddleston Jazz Band. Hugh received a trumpet as a gift from Father Huddleston whilst at the college. The FX Huller
trumpet donated by the great Louis Satchmo Armstrong to the school became a subject of media attention both locally and internationally. “If you could say that anybody single-handedly made apartheid a world issue then that person was Trevor Huddleston”, said Archbishop Mpilo Desmond Tutu of the Bedford-born philanthropist who died on 20 April 1998, having witnessed the fruit of his labour – a democratised South Africa. The Huddleston Jazz Band members were George Makhene – drums, Henley Mogobjane (later Ivan Mosia) (piano), Monty Mahobe (double bass), Jonas Gwangwa (trombone), Chips Molopyane (alto saxophone), Prince Moloi (alto saxophone), Hugh Masekela (trumpet) and master of improvisation “Moon” Masemola (tenor saxophone).

Like many of his peers, Hugh joined Alfred Herbert’s African Jazz Revue and Variety Show and later on the jazz musical, King Kong both exposing him to big crowds and travelling. These two national projects created a “graduation platform” that would in future lead to an intricate artist networking base both at home and in exile. Though he played for The Merry Makers during his school holidays, it was his membership of the Jazz Epistles that made history in his early days in South Africa. The harsh post-Sharpeville social conditions in the country forced many musicians either to swim or sink. Opportunities for musicians dried up. It was a cruel reminder of the Sophiatown forced removals – you had no chance against the brutality of the state. With the help of Trevor Huddleston and associates Yehud Menuhin and Johnny Dankworth he left the country for England in May 1960 after the Union Of Artists enrolled him at the Guildhall School Of Music in London. He abandoned the idea of schooling in London and was admitted at the Manhattan School Of Music in the US for further music studies. Hugh’s first major hit was Philemon Hou’s composition, Grazing In The Grass from the album The Promise Of A Future (1968). Together with fellow South African musicians Jonas Gwangwa and Caiphus Semenya they formed the powerful trio, Hugh Masekela and The Union Of South Africa. That was in the early seventies when I was introduced to his music by my young high school teachers who were fresh from “varsity”. Those were the days of the hippies when Hugh was huge among the students community.

Unfortunately, most of Hugh’s music was only available from private collectors as it was banned on the airwaves by the powers that be. He also recorded with the great South African reed player Dudu Pukwana in London. With producer Stewart Levine they formed Chisa Records in the late sixties. Some of the musicians he worked closely with was Caiphus Semenya and some former members of Sponono. In 1968 he returned to the African continent and visited Zambia where he drew more Afro inspiration for his future recordings. Later in 1972 he came back to Africa and while in Nigeria he worked with Fela Kuti and Cameroon’s Manu DiBango. A band with which he worked for almost five years was Hedzoleh Soundz from Ghana. After its demise he formed OJAH and released The Boy’s Doin’ It through the newly-launched record label, Casablanca
in 1975. In 1984 he shipped a 24-track mobile studio to neighbouring Botswana where he recorded his hot album, *Technobush*, accompanied by members of The Soul Brothers with the help of producer Stewart Levin. The facility at the Woodpecker Inn at the banks of the Notwane River became known as Battery Studios. The project was a partnership with Clive Calder’s Jive Records.

A cultural activist at heart, he once told me in a radio interview how he used to miss communicating in his home language, Setlokwa, to a point of speaking to himself. Some of his fellow South Africans who wrote songs for him include Caiphus Katse Semenya and Victor Mhleli Ntoni. By 1989 he was involved with Mbongeni Ngema’s Sarafina on Broadway. Hugh, who returned home with democracy in September 1990 staged a homecoming roadshow dubbed “Sekunjalo” (This is it!) with its Limpopo Province leg at Chuene Resort in February 1991. I attended this highly resourced and professional event, which was unfortunately not well-attended.

My first interview with “Bra Hugh” was telephonic, but he is such an eloquent communicator I would ask him one question and he’d answer almost all of my next questions. Hugh is one musician I still believe demands a lot from an interviewer; if you are not sure of what you want from him, he’ll end up interviewing you. He knows what he is about and says it. When I asked him about his place of birth he proudly praised his late granny, *Johanna Mthise WaMandebele a Kwa Nzunza… Mganu-Ganu ka Maghobhoria*. What he meant was that his granny was a descendant of the Mandebeles of Nzuza. When he recorded a vibrant programme jingle for Alex Jay’s morning show on Radio 5 (now 5FM), I suspected that one of those days he’d be asked to present programmes on radio.

Hugh helped to transform the arts in this new country from his office at that Tshwane labyrinth, the State Theatre as Deputy Director of the Performing Arts Council in the early days of our democracy. Today the centre is called the South African State Theatre. Talented and experienced Ramapolo later co-hosted a radio show with Sibongile Khumalo at a newly established Gauteng station, Kaya FM. Interestingly, Hugh’s son Selema became a successful television show host in the United States of America. Like father like son! Ramapolo also established the Musicians and Artists Assistance Programme of South Africa (MAAPSA) to help rehabilitate artists who experience problems of substance addiction. Hugh travelled far and wide, appeared on many albums including collaborations. One of the highlights of his career will always be his involvement in the mammoth and spectacular concert that served as a prelude to the Muhammad Ali and George Foreman World heavyweight championship fight in Zaire.

Like Sibongile, he joined Sony Records under Lazzie Serobe and Lindelani Mkhize. His album *Notes Of Life* (1997) was nominated for Best Contemporary Jazz Performance in the 3rd annual FNB SAMA and *Time* (2002) was the winner of SAMA 9’s Best Male Artist and Best Producer categories. He co-produced the album with Blondie Makhene and Khaya Mahlangu. Sony Music digitally
remastered his 1982 album *Home* as part of its Classic Collection series. Some of his hits were *In The Marketplace*, *Nomali*, *African Scrapyard*, *Motlalepula*, *Stimela*, *Heartbreaker*, *Ha Le Se Le Di Khanna*, *Bring Back Nelson Mandela* and *Thanayi*. He also worked with Mbongeni Ngema on his successful play and film *Sarafina* as well as Paul Simon on his musical phenomenon, *Graceland*.

One trumpeter who has left a lasting impression on Hugh is Elijah Nkwanyane of the Merry Makers of Payneville, Springs. Talking to industry insiders about this legend I discovered two things about him: professionalism and respect for change. In his live shows and recordings he worked with young musicians both as producers, singers and instrumentalists: Joe Nina, Swazi Dlamini, Jahseed, Stoan, Blondie, Thandiswa, Don, Oskido, Vicky Vilakazi, Margaret Motsage, Letoya Makhene and many others. The best example of this is *Revival* (2004), produced by a talented youngster who impressed him while working together on the *Surf Tribute To Dolly Rathebe* project, Zwai Bala as well as the magnificent “Guffy” Godfrey Pilane. No wonder the album was nominated in the Best Contemporary Jazz Album category of SAMA 11. *Almost Like Being In Jazz* was recorded with Stewart Levine, Lorca Hart, Larry Willis and John Heard. After working with many musicians in the USA, the UK, Botswana, Lesotho, Ghana and Nigeria, back home he formed a formidable band consisting of John Selolwane (guitar), Mandla Zikalala (bass guitar), Arthur Tshabalala (piano), Ezbie Moilwa (keyboards) and Dumisane Hlela (drums).

Masekela’s autobiography titled *Still Grazing: The Musical Journey of Hugh Masekela* (Three River Press, 2004) says more about the many countries he toured, his trials, tribulations and triumphs and some of the highlights of his career. The book coincided with the release of the 2004 CD of the same name. In 2006 it was reported that it would be made into a film through his Chissa Pictures. He won the Best Male Artist: southern Africa of the Kora All Africa Music Awards in 2005, but the cherry on top was being crowned Best African Male Artist. In 2006 Hugh wrote the score for a historic theatre production *The Truth In Translation*. His record label, Chissa Entertainment Group became involved in music, film and theatre production as well as artist and event management. Chissa International Group was launched on Tuesday, 31 October 2006 at the Theatre On The Tracks in Kyalami. As already mentioned, he formed Chisa Records in 1966 while in exile in the US. The name was inspired by a dance band from Benoni called Chisa Ramblers. An album was released to commemorate those years titled *The Chisa Years 1965–1975*. By 2007 the company’s artists included Hugh, Tsepo Tshola, Busi Mhlongo, Khaya Mahlangu, Ngwako Manamela and Springs-born multilingual Corlea Botha whose debut CD was *Shades of a Rainbow*. Irlaan Gillan was the managing director of the company.

In May 2007 “Motlokwa”, who spent six years of his exile time in Ghana was invited to the Jubilee Ghana Music Awards Festival. On his arrival he was honoured by the people of Ghana or should I say his in-laws, with a Jubilee
Special Lifetime Award! We must remember that in 2005 he was also honoured with a Lifetime Achievement Award by the Channel O Spirit of Africa Music Video Awards, an award he shares with his fellow African greats like Enoch Sontonga, Fela Kuti and Oliver Mtukudzi who was the 2007 recipient on 11 October at the Johannesburg City Hall. Towards the end of that year he was invited to perform with the London Symphony Orchestra at London’s Barbican Centre on 28 November 2007. By the way, the schoolmate who motivated him way back, Stompie Manana was still actively involved in music in 2001 as witnessed with the release of his album titled *Art In Rhythm*.

Some of Hugh Masekela’s albums:

1963 *Trumpet Africaine* 1977 *You Told Your Mama Not To Worry*
1965 *The Americanisation Of Ooga-Booga* (a live recording) 1978 *Herb Alpert/Hugh Masekela*
1966 *Hugh Masekela’s Next Album* 1978 *Main Event Live*
1967 *The Emancipation Of Hugh Masekela* 1982 *Home*
1968 *Promise Of A Future* 1983 *Working For A Dollar Bill*
1968 *Masekela* 1984 *Technobush*
1968 *Grrr!* 1985 *Waiting For The Rain*
1969 *Hugh Masekela and The Union of South Africa* 1987 *Tomorrow*
1970 *Reconstruction* 1989 *Uptownship*
1972 *The African Connection* 1994 *Hope*
1972 *Home Is Where The Music Is* 1994 *Stimela*
1974 *I Am Not Afraid* 1997 *Notes Of Life*
1975 *The Boy’s Doin It* 1998 *Black To The Future*
1976 *Colonial Man* 1999 *Sixty*
1976 *Melody Maker* 2002 *Time*
1976 *The Last Impression Of Hugh Masekela* 2004 *Revival*
1977 *Grazing In The Grass* 2004 *Still Grazing*

Hugh’s more than 40 albums include compilations. Some of his projects include *Alive And Well At The Whiskey, Hugh Masekela Introducing Hedzoleh Soundz* as
well contributions to theatrical musicals like Mbongeni Ngema’s Sarafina and Caiphus Semenya’s Buwa. He was part of the Graceland tour and has established the Botswana International School of Music (now National Cultural Centre). Hugh is just an institution himself!

The Semenya people have their roots in Moletji, Polokwane. In fact, talking to Caiphus Semenya he told me that the original title of his composition, Caution was Moletji, dedicated to his village. His composition Khandu from the album Woman Got A Right To Be (1994) says a lot about his knowledge of the communities around the province of Limpopo. He grew up in Alexandra township where at the age of nine up to 14 he attended church every Sunday with his mother and granny. Their church was the African Methodist known to the locals as “Tonki” in 10th Avenue, Alexandra township. One hymn that made an impact on the young boy was Ke Dumetse Ho Morena as he says in his prologue to his track of the same name from the above-mentioned album. His spirituality is revealed in his rendition of another track titled Mdalí Wethu.

By 1956 Caiphus Katse Semenya was leading the Katzenjammer Kids. They performed mostly in community halls and schools. Those were the days of established groups like the late Victor Ndlazilwane’s Woody Woodpeckers. It was at such performances that he met a young trumpeter named Hugh Masekela. He hardly knew he would write him many songs like Ha Le Se Le Di Khanna and Bo-Masekela and work with him on albums like the Union Of South Africa and Home Is Where The Music Is in the future. In 1959 he also played for the legendary musical, King Kong. In 1964 he toured the USA with the play “Sponono”, whose original cast included Matiwane Manana. Matiwane later worked with Miriam Makeba and Letta Mbulu; he was also part of the “Lumumba” performers. When the Sponono shows ended in New York in 1965 Caiphus and Douglas Xaba decided to look for alternatives while the rest of the members formed the group, The Zulus. Caiphus, who’d been locally groomed by composers and master musicians like Kippie Morolong Moeketsi and Victor Ndlazilwane worked with Hugh in his projects and later became a world-class prolific composer, producer, arranger and performer based in the US. Besides his fellow South Africans Hugh Masekela, Jonas Gwangwa and Miriam Makeba on whose album A Promise he was responsible for horn arrangements, one musician who worked very close to Caiphus is international ace producer, Quincy Jones. Their collaborations led to Caiphus’s musical contribution to the film, Roots. The two-part Alex Harley film is based on the harsh realities of the enslavement of Africans by westerners. This is illustrated through the tragic story of Kunta Kinte of the Mandinka tribe in Gambia. The film inspired Irish female singer Sinead O’Connor’s hit single Mandinka, which reached the UK Top 20 in 1988. It was the kind of film you looked forward to watching and yet walked out of the cinema very, very angry. I remember walking out of Astra Cinema in Polokwane and meeting a friend in the street who asked me, “Why do you look so upset? Have you been watching
Roots?" I was later able to play some sound tracks from the movie on radio as Noel Pointer released the tracks *Oluwa* and *Mama Aifambeni* on his album *Hold On* (Liberty, 1978). When Quincy recorded his album *Back On The Block*, Semenya wrote some tracks for the 1995 Grammy Award winning album. Katse also wrote the original music score for the Steven Spielberg-directed film, *The Colour Purple* which was nominated for the 1985 Oscar Awards. The film made history by being the most nominated in various categories of the 58th event of the AMPAS. One thing that set him apart from his fellow musicians in exile was his partnership in music with his former King Kong cast member wife, **Letta Mbulu**.

Letta’s talent was spotted near her home in Orlando at the age of 13 by Jimmy Mabena, manager of The Swanky Spots. It was while playing the role of a schoolgirl in *King Kong* that she caught the eye of her future hubby. In an interview Semenya revealed to me that he strategically befriended her brother to be closer to her. After touring the country in 1958 and 1959, the musical went to London in 1961. When Caiphus was touring America with the musical Sponono in 1964, he invited Letta to join him. Letta arrived in New York in 1965. After staying with Hugh, Miriam and daughter Bongi, they later stayed in Los Angeles, started a family and returned home after 27 years. During those years they wrote songs together and he produced his wife’s albums for as long as I can remember. Though her debut album *Letta Mbulu Sings* was released back in 1967 through Capitol Records, I first heard Letta’s music from my friend Moss Matlalepoo’s first Sony tape recorder in 1977. It was when her *Maru A Pula* hit these shores and dominated the hit parade of every sober radio station in the country. After a year followed another bombshell, *Buza*. The platinum album, *Sound Of A Rainbow* was released in 1980 and featured hits like *Everybody Sing Along* and *Help Me Somebody*. To fight ethnicity and the divide and rule policy of the white regime in South Africa, they’d fuse African languages in their compositions. An example of that was *Ndi-phendule* containing Sotho and Nguni lyrics cementing unity among blacks in South Africa. With him singing in Sotho and his wife in Nguni, the duet became a monster hit. This was their first work with Munjale Records after leaving A&M Records.

Letta who became a star at a very young age was the youngest member of the historic African Jazz And Variety Show, which was launched in the early fifties. Other groups she worked with include The Skylarks and Jazz Dazzlers. Ever since she mesmerised the Americans with her Village Gate Theatre performance in New York as an opening act for the great Thelonious Monk, the world has embraced her. Some of her awards include an Emmy Award for her performance in the two-part Alex Hayley film, *Roots*, and the Ondo Nueva International Songwriters Competition in Caracas, Venezuela. The super songstress also participated in the soundtrack of *The Colour Purple*. The film was Steven Spielberg’s adaptation of Alice Walker’s work. In 1970 Letta had a big
international hit, *I Need Your Love* from her Tamla Motown album, *Letta*. Other hits included *Music In The Air, Inkedama, Kukuchi, Jikijela, Ha Re Je, Sacred Drum, Ke Dumetse, Nomalizo* and *Kube*.

In 1982 Semenya launched his solo career with the album *Listen To The Wind* featuring hits like *Angelina* and *Ziphinkomo*. From there followed albums like *Streams Today, Rivers Tomorrow*. His other hits included *Mamase, Nomalanga, Play With Fire* as well as the classic, *Matswale*. In the mid-eighties the music couple toured Botswana and Lesotho backed by South African musicians with whom he wanted to share his experiences and also learn from. The musicians were Condry Ziqubu, Sipho Gumede, Enoch Mthalane, Beulah Hashe, Thandi Seoka and Pamela Makhene. They were complemented by David Serame from Germany, Wally Loate who was later based in London and Sounds Of Soweto under the leadership of Josh Sello Makhene, as well as Mac and Madoda Mathunjwa. Semenya is a very bold musician who promoted his culture despite the attitude of the US record bosses then. He told me that in those days it was not easy to record songs like *Maru A Pula* and *Ha Re Je* as record companies wanted the “Baby I Love You” kind of songs for a quick buck.

When the world paid tribute to Dr Rolihlahla Mandela in 1989 as the demand for his release reached its peak, Semenya became one of the musical directors of the “Nelson Mandela Tribute” concert at Wembley Stadium. Like all our exiled brothers and sisters, after the unbanning of liberation movements he returned home. I attended what I always regard as his welcome home party, the “Unity Concert” he headlined at the FNB Stadium. My memory of the concert also brings back David Serame singing Safre’s *Something Inside So Strong*. By the way, Serame left South Africa with the musical *King Kong*. The singer nicknamed “The Undertaker” by his friends lived in Hamburg, Germany for sixteen years, and even as I write this book, is based in London. Semenya was my first encounter with my musician brothers and sisters from exile. In our first meeting I immediately understood the deep and broad knowledge and experience these creative cultural activists were bringing back home. He is a humble professional whose cultural roots dominate his music. As already alluded to, he is part of the reason why I wrote this book. Back home he released *Woman Got A Right To Be* (1994), produced by himself, Letta and Lebo M. It set the tone for the country’s new culture in relations between men and women. Sony Music re-released the following albums under the ‘Classic Collection’ series: *Listen to The Wind, The Very Best Of Caiphus Semenya, The Best of Caiphus Semenya and Letta Mbulu* as well as Letta’s *Sound of A Rainbow* and *In The Village The Music Never Ends*. The digitally remastered series’ logo was *Yesterday’s Music Today*. Like Masekela, Semenya also used to invite his favourite local musicians like Condry Ziqubu and Themba Mkhize to tour with him around the world. One of such tours include bringing his 1986 production, *Buwa*, to Africa raising money for the liberation movements. The couple returned to
South Africa in 1991. Shocked by the state of poverty among fellow blacks in the townships and villages she was inspired to release the album, *Not Yet Uhuru* (Munjale, 1992). The album was co-produced by the couple. In April 2002 Letta toured India and performed in New Delhi and Mombai to strengthen cultural bonds between South Africa and India. No wonder her country of birth honoured her with a doctorate – Dr Letta Mbulu! The CD *The Best Of Letta & Caiphus* (1996) pays tribute to the genius of the two. *Letta Mbulu Sings/Free Soul* was released on CD in 2005. By 2006 the couple was working on Letta’s long-awaited album, which was finally released in 2008 under the title *Culani Nami*. Their son, Muntu followed in their footsteps and became a music producer, while his younger brother Mosese is a film producer. Mosese is married to Blondie Makhene’s daughter, Pauline. Their elder brother, Sipho who was still in America is a painter. Caiphus Semenya’s contribution to local content on television include the music scores for the Molo Fish series, *Vicious Circle* and *Gabo Motho*.

**Mosa Jonas Gwangwa** belongs to the Ndebeles of Mashashane; to be precise, his father was a resident of ga-Maraba, Kalkspruit. I was privileged to be part of the team that organised his historical “Welcome Home” event right in the heart of that village just after the release of his album, *Sounds From Exile* (Sony Music, 2002). Kgošigadi Carnation Maraba expressed her welcome of their son by allocating a stand to him so that he can build his house there when he retires. One of the tracks from his album, *A Temporary Inconvenience* (Sony Music, 1999) titled *Ga-Mashashane* is dedicated to these people he comes from.

Jonas was born on 19 October 1937 in Orlando East after his carpenter father had moved to Soweto. His parents were Wilson Johnny Gwangwa and Sophia Mamosima Gwangwa. His late sister, Margaret was a concert pianist and singer. This son of the first carpentry teacher in Orlando was enrolled at the legendary St Peter’s Secondary School where he later became trombonist in the Father Trevor Huddleston Jazz Band whose members included Hugh Masekela. The two were to cross roads many times in their careers.

Mosa left South Africa on 7 February 1961 with the musical *King Kong*. After six months in London, like Hugh Masekela he received a scholarship to study at the Manhattan School Of Music in New York, USA. A picture of the young Mosa arriving in New York, Apartment 310, West 87 in 1962 is included on the sleeve of his CD *Sounds From Exile*. He was welcomed by Hugh to the States. As already indicated, together with Masekela and Semenya they formed the trio, Hugh Masekela and The Union Of South Africa for which he composed the flagship track, *Shebeen*. Unfortunately, he was hit by a car crossing a street in the Bronx and lay in hospital for quite some time. Although musos like Dudu Pukwana and Makhaya Ntshoko were roped in to keep the flame, in a way the accident spelt the demise of The Union. His early production work includes the 1965 Grammy winning album, *An Evening With Harry Belafonte And Miriam Makeba*. 
In 1978 together with Hugh Masekela and Herb Alpert they embarked on the US “Main Event” tour. One other musician who worked very close to him was Ahmad Jamal (born Frederick Russell Jones) as well as compatriot Churchill Jolobe. Following various youth cultural festivals held at places like Lagos, Cuba and Moscow he was requested by the African National Congress to form the Arts and Culture wing. He formed a 16-piece band, Amandla Cultural Ensemble in Angola. All members of the band were liberation soldiers who became actors, singers, poets, costume designers as well as sound and light technicians during the shows. The ensemble worked hand in hand with groups like the Musicians Union to create awareness of the brutality and injustices of apartheid. This freedom fighter who wielded a trombone as a spear toured the world on this mission. He told me that on 16 June 1976 he was in Botswana when all hell broke loose back home in South Africa. Soweto was on fire!

By 1983 he had formed a band named Shakawe. It consisted of Steve Dyer, Tony Cedras, Dennis Mpale and Batswana musicians. Shakawe is the name of a village in the north-western corner of Botswana; also the name of the airport serving the village. One of the band members, his homeboy Dennis Mpale was later, after the democratisation of South Africa, to participate in the London recording of his album Flowers Of The Nation (Sony Music, 2001). The album was produced by Sabata Lebona who met Jonas through his brother, Miki Lebona. Unlike his other fellow musicians in exile whose music we were able to listen to and buy at home, his was an underground industry marketed in whispers and jargon. Responding to my question on how the release of Dr Nelson Mandela affected their lives as musicians in exile, he said it was always expected to happen. He said the philosophy of ANC president, the late Oliver Reginald Tambo, was that of keeping the name of Mandela alive. He was worried that if they did not create noise and stories about his incarceration on the island, the world could soon forget about him and while everybody was looking elsewhere, faceless agents of the regime could make him disappear. This flame was kept alive with celebrations of Mandela’s birthdays, his speeches, commemorations, as well as campaigns for his release. The freedom fighters were regularly told that victory was only five years away. Keep the faith.

One of the best publicly known achievements of this freedom fighter was his involvement in the Richard Attenborough revolutionary film Cry Freedom based on the life of the late Black Consciousness Movement leader, Steve Bantu Biko. He wrote the music score for the film that received various accolades: two Oscar nominations, a BAFTA nomination, Anthony Asquith nomination, Golden Globe Award, Grammy Award, Ivor Novello Award and the Friends Of The Black Emmy Award. With the unbanning of liberation movements he returned home with his wife, Violet. He is a self-confessed family-loving man and the lyrics of his Moroa attest to this. They’ve been blessed with two sons and three daughters. One of the daughters, Margaret Ndritihlalele Gwangwa, did
stage directing and is a backing singer in her father’s band. Talking to her made me realise how clued-up she was with her dad’s showbiz.

“Mothokwa” has written more than 16 musical scores and theme songs including his projects in post-apartheid South Africa like Soweto Green starring Dr John Kani; Ulibambe Lingashoni, the ANC television documentary; The South African Love Story, a television documentary based on the life of the late ANC leaders Walter Sisulu and his wife, Albertina as well as the musical Sing Africa Dance! His theme songs include television signature tunes to Dali Tambo’s show. He has performed in more than 16 major concerts around the world. His highlights on his return home include a Meritorious Award from President Nelson Mandela. The premier music awards in the country, the SAMA honoured him with a Life Time Achievement Award as well as the Best Adult Contemporary African Jazz Album for Sounds From Exile (Sony Music, 2002).

The trombonist composer who defines music as “organised noise for a purpose” and coined sub-genres like “Bluesqanga”, blows trombone brands like the “King”, but his ideal is the “Bach”, which is top of the range. He has the highest regard for players of the “unmarked” musical instruments – trombone and violin. Specialists in those instruments are very scarce in South Africa. His best local trombonist is Jasper Cooke. Mosa’s albums are: A Temporary Inconvenience (Sony Music, 1999) co-produced with Kenny Mathaba; Flowers Of The Nation (Sony Music, 2001) co-produced with Koloi Lebona and Sounds From Exile (Sony Music, 2002) co-produced with Kenny Mathaba. On a parting shot I asked him about the philosophy behind the title A Temporary Inconvenience and his reply was that even if you may be involved in three major accidents like he was, you will not die as long as you’ve not fulfilled your Creator’s mission. The accidents are just a temporary inconvenience. The “Walk of Fame” legend later released his first DVD titled Jonas Gwangwa – Live At The Standard Bank International Jazz Festival (Sony/BMG). By 2007 he and Hugh Masekela had featured on various musicians’ albums including Keiko Matsui’s Moyo.

Another musician who worked with “Mothokwa” Jonas Gwangwa in exile is Steve Dyer. Born in Pietermaritzburg, by the age of 11 he was already strumming the guitar. He did his classical music degree at the University of Natal and left South Africa for Botswana in 1982. As already alluded to, he helped Jonas Gwangwa to form Shakawe and started playing flute and saxophone. In 1986 he was in Zimbabwe playing with musicians like Jethro Shasha and the Jazz Survivors. Later he went abroad and played with Gwangwa and Philip Tabane. In Zimbabwe he became involved in various performances including Caiphus and Letta’s show, “Buwa”. He formed his own band, Southern Freeway in 1989 and together they released a self-titled album. Their other album was Indlela Yenkululekho. He toured many countries including Japan with the Gwangwa-led Amandla Cultural Ensemble. In 1992 he returned to South Africa and featured in various performances and television shows. He also produced promos, ads and
campaigns for various media organisations. As a music producer his products
include albums of Devera Ngwena, Oliver Mtukudzi, Esta M and Junuthu. He
also produced the music for the television documentary on the life of the late
ANC stalwart, “Xhamela” Walter Sisulu. As musical director he worked with the
Soweto String Orchestra and Mahube, a star-studded show that performed in
Germany in 1997 at the “Out Of Africa Festival”. Mahube’s CD Mahube: Music
From Southern Africa was released on the Sheer Sound label performed very
well in the SAMAs. He also worked with Kora 96 Best African Arranger, Denzil
Weale on Ethnic Dream. Steve’s solo albums include Down South In Africa (2000)
(featuring my favourite track, Umkhumbane), Son Of The Soil (2002), Lifecycle

Recently as I was playing various versions of the traditional song, Shosholoza
I was quite impressed with Abdullah Ibrahim’s passionate piano playing from
his Township One More Time album (SAMA 5 Best Producer nomination). The
rendition gives one a vivid picture of the master at work. Born Adolf Johannes
Brand on 9 October 1934, jazz pianist Dollar Brand is from a family of six siblings
in District Six, Cape Town. I was struck by some similarities between him and
Caiphus Semenya: both musicians’ formative spiritual years were influenced by
their mothers and grannies, attended the AME Church; love the piano and their
wives are successful musicians in their own right.

From the age of four, Dollar was playing the piano like his granny and his
mother. At the age of 16 he had had enough of bands that always wanted to
tell him what to play because they stifled his creativity and originality. This
is another reason why he chose the piano because with it he could be a one-
man band. The Manhattan Brothers invited him on their Eastern Cape tour
performing mainly traditional songs. He was also invited by a former school
teacher, musician and singer Sathima Bea Benjamin to join her band. They
married in 1965 and were blessed with a son Tsakwe, and a daughter Tsidi.
Dollar was musically motivated by Miles Davis and Duke Ellington as well as
the support of his parents and wife Sathima. Other bands he played for include
Tuxedo Slickers, the Willie Max Big Band as well as the legendary Jazz Epistles.
As early as 1962 the Dollar Brand Trio toured Europe: Dollar (piano), Johnny
Gertze (bass) and Makhaya Ntshoko (drums). His 1965 performance in Zurich
impressed the legendary Duke Ellington. In 1976 he left South Africa for good to
live in various cities like Dakar, Zurich, Copenhagen and New York. The couple
was invited to New York by Duke Ellington when they met face to face for the
first time in Paris. Duke launched his international career with the recording
of Duke Ellington Presents The Dollar Brand Trio. With more than 130 albums
and 250 compositions to his name, some of his evergreens are: Mannenberg, Blues
For A Hip King, Tintinyane, Bra Timing From Phomolong, Anthem For A New Nation,
The Wedding and Beautiful Love. In 1968 he converted to Islam and changed his
name from Dollar Brand to Abdullah Ibrahim. Abdullah who holds a sixth
Dan Black Belt in Yakami martial arts plays many instruments but his passion remains the piano. By 1986 his song *South African Sunshine* ranked second place on the Anti-Apartheid Top Ten charts of British magazine, *New Musical Express*. He has also written soundtracks for films in the late eighties, which include *Chocolat* and *No Fear, No Die*. His wife Sathima Bea Benjamin used to be known as Bea Benjamin. She has released her own albums, which include *Love Light, Sathima Sings Ellington, Dedications And Memories, Dreams* and *Cape Town Love*. She owns a record label, Ekapa. Son Tsakwe is a musician who plays keyboards and composes songs while he’s also into Information Technology. Daughter Tsidi has formed a rap group, Natural Resources, whose debut album was titled *Baseball*.

New York-based Dr Abdullah Ibrahim’s passion in the new South Africa became the development of young musicians like the Port Elizabeth trumpeter, Feya Faku just as he too was mentored by seasoned musicians of the sixties. The respect the new South Africa has for this gentle giant is evident in accolades he received and tributes dedicated to him. The UCT conferred on him an honorary doctorate. His local performance highlights include the historic “Rhythms Of Africa” at Sun City with Rebecca Malope, Sibongile Khumalo and Yvonne Chaka Chaka accompanied by the National Symphony Orchestra in 1994. Some of his new projects in the newly-born country include the establishment of the New Cape String Orchestra, the Cape Town Jazz Orchestra, music academies in Cape Town and Johannesburg as well as the release of *Ya Rona* (1996). For more on the life of this king of ivories, there are documentaries on his life. In 1986 Chris Austin put together a documentary film titled *A Brother With Perfect Timing* with recreated scenes of District Six filmed in Zimbabwe, and Sophiatown scenes shot in Harlem, US. Another recent documentary, *Abdullah Ibrahim: A Struggle For Love*, was shown in South Africa in 2005. The guru was honoured with a Lifetime Achievement Award during the 2006 SAMA. His albums include the following:

1969 *African Piano*
1973 *African Space Program*
1973 *This is Dollar Brand*
1974 *Mannenberg – Is Where It’s Happening*
1976 *Banyana- The Children of Africa*
1976 *Black Lightning*
1978 *Buddy Tate Meets Dollar Brand*
1979 *African Marketplace*

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1988 *Windif* (Soundtrack for film “Chocolat”)
1989 *African River*
1990 *No Fear No Die*
1991 *Desert Flowers*
1991 *Mantra Mode*
1993 *Knysna Blue*
1995 *Yarona*
1997 *Cape Town Flowers*
1979 Dollar Brand Plays Sphere Jazz 1998 African Suite
1979 African Tears and Laughter 1999 Township One More Time
1979 Echoes From Africa 2000 Cape Town Revisited
1982 African Dawn 2000 Ekapa Lodumo
1983 South Africa 2001 African Symphony
1984 Ekaya 2004 A Struggle for Love
1985 Water From an Ancient Well

Also found in his long catalogue are: Tintinyane, Peace, Dollar Brand Duet, African Magic, Journey, Live At Montreaux, African Sun, Natural Rhythm, Ode To Duke, Reflections, Solo, The Dream and The Mountain.

Another South African New Yorker is band leader, Morris Goldberg. He grew up in Observatory, Cape Town and like Kippie Moeketsi started playing clarinet before he became known for his saxophone. According to his biography his influences include Kippie Moeketsi, Chris Ngcukana and guitarist Harold Jaftha. This multi-instrumentalist also plays the flute and penny whistle. Like most of his peers he moved to England in 1960, but in 1962 settled in the US where he enrolled with the Manhattan School Of Music. Like Gwangwa he was hosted by Hugh in his first days in the States. He later worked with musicians like Harry Belafonte, Miriam Makeba and Letta Mbulu. The versatile Goldberg who can easily switch from jazz to mbaqanga was a music tutor in the seventies. Never forgetting his roots he now and then visited South Africa to record albums like Mannenberg (1974) with Abdullah Ibrahim, and Jazz In Transit (1983). His contributions include Hugh Masekela’s 1989 album, Uptownship. Morris was also part of the Paul Simon project, Graceland (1985). After performing with Miriam Makeba and touring with Hugh Masekela as part of his band, he returned to sunny SA in 1991. Maybe one could say his homecoming celebration was “Sekunjalo”, the Hugh Masekela roadshow. According to the Steve Gordon biography, “Mo Gee” went back to New York where he performs with his band, Ojoyo. His albums include Sophiatown Society (with Pops Mohamed), Ojoyo – Safrojazz Township (with Bakithi Khumalo, Tony Cedras and Anton Fig), African Gold (2000) and Forward Motion (2003).

Born Cecil Barnard in Crawford, Cape Town, on 7 June 1941, Hotep Idris Galeta was given piano lessons by his father at a young age. He was later mentored by master pianist Abdullah Ibrahim. In 1961 he left South Africa for the US via London. Once there, he worked with various musicians including his compatriots Hugh Masekela and Letta Mbulu. He was offered a scholarship
to study jazz piano under John Mehegan. Hotep holds a Master’s degree in jazz and lectured at the University Of Hartford in Connecticut from 1985 until 1991 when he returned home. Back at home he got involved in various projects and worked as music lecturer at the University Of Fort Hare, Alice in the Eastern Cape. His albums include Malay Tone Poem, a SAMA 9 nomination for Best Male Artist and Best South African Traditional Jazz Album.

Trumpeter Ziqqibo Dennis Mpale was born in Queenstown and grew up in Orlando East, Soweto. His early interest in music dates back to his high school days at Orlando High. Rehearsals of musicians like Gwigwi Mrwebi, Ntemi Piliso and Mackay Davashe at Orlando Communal Hall as well as the DOCC fascinated him so much that he wanted to be like them one day. But one musician who made a lasting impression on him was trumpeter, Kleintjie Rubushe. To achieve his dream, he did piece jobs after school until he had enough money to buy a trumpet. By 1958 he was playing for the Blue Serenaders. Another opportunity opened when Hugh Masekela left the country for London as he was invited to replace him in the Father Huddleston Band.

After realising his shortcomings, he attended music classes at Dorkay House under tutelage of Professor Khabi Mngoma and Kippie Moeketsi. Some of the bands he played for at that stage were African Jazz Revue And Variety Show of Alf Herbert and Mackay Davashe’s Jazz Dazzlers. He also toured with his pianist friend, Chris McGregor. As Cape Town has always been the melting pot of jazz activity, in the mid-sixties he was working down there with Dudu Pukwana, Chris McGregor and Nick Moyake. Together with Abdullah Ibrahim and Makhaya Ntshoko they invaded the club circuit of the Cape. Later he joined Barney Rachabane, Tete Mbambisa and Ronnie Beer to do shows around the province. Tete Mbambisa’s Soul Jazzmen and Shakes Mgudlwa’s Soul Giants are some of the bands he played with in the Eastern Cape. It was during that time that he inspired young trumpeter, Duke Ngcukana who also liked the slower style of Mongezi Feza.

In 1970 Dennis joined Babsy Mlangeni’s tours around the country with Winston Mankunku Ngozi. The two later joined Fever, a band whose members included Willie Nettie and Spencer Mbadu. After a stint with the newly-formed African Jazz Pioneers in 1983, he toured Botswana and never came back as he had been tipped by reliable sources that he was on the authorities’ hit list. In Botswana he joined MEDU Arts Ensemble, a brainchild of Jonas Gwangwa, Wally Serote and the late George and Lindi Phahle. He also became member of Jonas Gwangwa’s group, Shakawe. Dennis travelled the world with the Amandla Cultural Ensemble. By the late eighties he was in London where he worked with Dudu Pukwana’s band, Zila; toured with Caiphus Semenya’s musical, Buwa and participated in the Free Mandela Concert at Wembley stadium. He was later part of the recording of Jonas Gwangwa’s Flowers Of The Nation.

When all liberation movements were unbanned, Mpale too returned home to
sunny SA. Some of his first involvements were at Kippie’s with Mike Makhalemele on his Thabang project, as well as some projects with Zim Ngqawana. He then formed his band, Return whose members were Sello Montwedi, Wessel van Rensburg, Bushy Seathlolo, Jasper Cooke and Sydney Mnisi. Dennis Mpale’s works include *I Remember Nick* (1968); *Soweto (African Herbs)* (1975); *Early Mart For Gallo* (a tribute to the late Early Mabuza, 1970) with Gideon Nxumalo, Allen Kwela and Malindi Blythe Mbityana; *Roots* (with Barney Rachabane, Duke Makasi and Sipho Gumede, 1975); *Black And Brown Cherries* (with Abdullah Ibrahim, 1976); *Our Boys Are Doing It* (with Pat Mtashikiza and Kippie Moeketsi, 1975); *Paying My Bills* (with Peter Moticoe, 1995) and *Nothing But The Jam* (with Mduduzi Masilela, 1997). I met “Bra Dennis” face to face in 1995 just after the release of his album *Paying My Bills*. After our interaction in that interview he remained in the chamber of my heart reserved for gentle giants. After an illustrious career of more than 39 years, he bowed out in August 1997 and was laid to rest at Soweto’s Avalon Cemetery. In 2005 a remembrance compilation CD was released titled *Remember Dennis Mpale: The Man Behind The Trumpet*. Needless to say, a must for serious collectors.

A young pianist from Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape called **Dudu Pukwana** arrived in the Mother City in the early fifties. When he joined Blue Notes under Chris McGregor he was persuaded to play saxophone as Chris himself was playing piano. The full Blue Notes line-up was Chris McGregor (piano), Dudu Pukwana (saxophone), Mongezi Feza (trumpet), Johnny Mbizo Dyani (bass) and Louis Moholo (drums). In 1964 they were invited to the Antibes Jazz Festival in France from which they never returned. Finally they found themselves in London and performed as Brotherhood of Breath continuing with their South African sound. Their 1964 album release was *Live In South Africa*. Chris McGregor who was born in the area that became known as the Transkei (now Eastern Cape) studied music in Cape Town. His early achievements include winning the 1963 Castle Lager Jazz Festival with the band Chris McGregor and The Castle Lager Big Band. Their recordings include *Jazz The African Sound*. When Pukwana met former Malombo drummer, Julian Bahula in 1969 they formed Spear. Later Dudu formed Zila, a band also joined by Dennis Mpale in the eighties. Julian formed Jabula with Terri Quaye, Graham Morgan, Dave Defries, Mike Rose, Steve Scipio, Lucky Ranku and Pinise Saul. South African Pinise Saul is the singer to whom Denise Mpale dedicated the track *Pinise’s Dance* on the album *I Remember Nick* and Lucky Ranku is a former member of Malombo Jazz Makers of Mamelodi, Tshwane. Later they played with a band of Capetonians called District Six. The nucleus of the band was three men: former Spirit Rejoice keyboard player Mervyn Africa (piano), Brian Abrahams (drums) and Russel Herman (guitar). The band played a blend of African jazz, township folk music and soul. At some stage the full band was: Dudu Pukwana (saxophone), Julian Bahula (drums), Mervyn Africa (piano), Pinise Saul (vocals), Lucky Ranku
(guitar), Russel Herman (guitar) and Frank Williams (saxophone). In 1972
Dudu’s saxophone was roped in to record The Union Of South Africa’s second
album Home Is Where The Music Is, a double album that also featured former Jazz
Epistles muso Makhaya Ntshoko who was in Zurich at the time. Pukwana’s
albums include Flute Music (1975), In The Townships (1983), Jazz Fantasia and
Brotherhood of Breath. Dudu and Chris McGregor passed away at the dawn of
the new South Africa in 1990. In a way, that was the end of an era leaving only
one living member of the original Chris McGregor’s Blue Notes, drummer Louis
Moholo. Who knows, maybe Chris, Mongezi, Johnny and Dudu are blowing a
Blue Note storm up there? In a television interview in August 2007 McGregor’s
widow Maxine, who has written a book on the late musician’s life announced
that a musical tribute would be staged in his honour in September 2007. In
the same month on Friday the 21st the Blue Notes were awarded the Order of
Ikhamanga by President Thabo Mbeki.

Master drummer Louis Moholo whose first recording in South Africa was
with the Chordettes in 1958 played with many bands in the UK. As part of
Brotherhood of Breath he released two albums and also did some live recordings.
His collaboration with the late bassist, Harry Miller was dynamic.

Dudu Pukwana’s and Johnny Dyani’s songwriting skills had together
already been showcased when they wrote themes for the 1987 Dyani album,
Witchdoctor’s Son. At the time Dudu was with Freedom Records and Johnny
released the album through Steeple Chase Music. The album included South
African traditional songs like Ntyilo Ntyilo and Magwaza. The sextet that recorded
the album was Johnny Dyani (bass), Dudu Pukwana (piano), John Tchicai (first
saxophone), Alfredo Do Nascimento (guitar), Luez Carlos de Sequaira (drums)
and Mohamed Ali-Jabry (percussion). The album was produced by Nils Winther.
At the time of writing this work in 2005 bassist Johnny Mbizos Dyani whose
recordings include Grand Mother’s Teaching had died 19 years before while at a
concert in Germany.

Julian Bahula’s Jabula recorded two albums with Virgin Records and the
third was an Amsterdam recording for the anti-apartheid movement. They
toured the world’s continents staging many concerts including the Unity Festival
in Harvard Stadium, Boston with Robert Nesta Marley, the Festival For Arts
And Culture (Festac) in Lagos, Nigeria (1977), as well as the Youth Festival in
Cuba (1978). His next band, Jazz Africa formed at the beginning of the eighties,
released the album Son Of Soil. The members of the band were Michael Nielson
(saxophone), Mervyn Africa (keyboards), Lucky Ranku (guitar), Peter Segona
(trumpet), Roberto Bellatalla (bass), Alan Jackson (drums), Dill Katz and
Chucho Merchant.

In my early days as a radioman I used to be sentimental towards titles like
Moholo’s Morwa Bahula and Hugh Maekela’s Bo-Masekela. To me it was an
expression of a deep longing for my own people from the wilderness. One of my
all-time favourites is *Tribute To You* from Julian’s album, *Wind Of Change*. Some of the music scores he wrote for film include soundtracks for Michael Beazley’s *Africa*, a documentary on African history, *South Africa Under The Skin* as well as *The Wasted Land*. He featured in films such as: *Jabula: A Band In Exile*, *Blue Notes And Exiled Voices* as well as *Musicians In Exile*. His Tsafrika Productions organised the first Nelson Mandela Birthday Concert at Alexandra Palace, London. This was on 17 July 1983, Tata’s 65th birthday, and Dudu Pukwana led the South African artists group. When political prisoners were released and liberation movements unbanned, the Ersterus son came back home to celebrate with the new nation. But, like Abdullah Ibrahim, Lucky Ranku and others, he comes in and out of the country now and then due to a long-established relationship network with the outside world. To welcome the new democracy, he released *Wind Of Change* (GMP, 1996), an album featuring Chico Freeman on tenor saxophone. His compliments are very clear – “Let The Wind Blow and Bring Peace to All”. In appreciation for being given a second chance to live after a near-fatal car accident in 1996, he released *Live Again* in 2007 featuring Philip Tabane, Abe Cindi and younger local musos. The album was released through his Jabula Music and Gallo Records. It was nominated for MTN SAMA 14’s Best Contemporary Jazz Album category.

Julian’s former band mate, *Madumetja Lucky Ranku*, followed him and arrived in England in the mid-seventies fleeing the dark forces of the regime. Lucky, who was born in Lady Selbourne and grew up in Mamelodi, joined Malombo Jazz Makers in 1965 as a guitarist when Philip Tabane went solo. The other remaining members of the band were Abey Cindi (flute/saxophone) and Julian Bahula (drums). He played for the band until 1975. His band, African Follies staged fundraising concerts for Steve Biko’s South African Students’ Organisation (SASO). Before long he was on the government’s “troublemakers” list. He left the country with the help of Julian. Lucky has released and featured on many albums including his work with Dudu Pukwana and Mike Oldfield, who is famous for *Tubular Bells*. Groups Lucky worked with include The London Gospel Choir, the SA All Stars, Township Express as well as his own band, Mamelodi. By 2005 he was with The African Jazz All Stars, a ten-piece band that included trumpeter Claude Deppa and vocalist Pinise Saul. Lucky is a music tutor at Leeds College of Music and lives in Manchester with his daughter, Onica. My memory was recently refreshed on the life of the master guitarist when I watched a documentary titled TBC on SABC 1 on the evening of 1 November 2006 featuring Pinise Saul’s visit to Cape Town. It was an unforgettable experience with Pinise visiting friends and relatives at various spots including Langa Township. Lucky, Mervyn Africa and some local musicians formed her “homecoming” band. Though “home will always be home”, the two were honest about the realities of staying in England where they are rooted. Lucky who left South Africa when his son was only 11 sadly remembered how
he had to come home to bury him. However, he said his consolation is his son’s children – his grandchildren.

Bassist, composer, arranger and producer **Victor Mhleli Ntoni** started his music career as a young man in Cape Town’s townships. Together with McCoy Mrubata they practiced day and night to perfect their skills and realise their dreams. It was while he was rehearsing with the late drummer Nelson Magwaza that he caught the attention of Dollar Brand (Abdullah Ibrahim). Later he featured on Dollar’s album, *Peace*. He learned a lot from the master. After playing with various local jazz musicians including his own sextet, he later joined musicians in exile. By 1979 he was playing and writing songs in Hugh Masekela’s band in New York. According to “Bra Hugh” Victor wrote many songs, some of which were not easy to record without the assistance of South African indigenous talent. One of the compositions, *Nomalizo*, is included on Hugh Masekela’s 1999 album, *Sixty*. I remember seeing his name on Ratau Mike Mkhalemele’s album, *Soweto Sunrise* (Masterpiece, 1984) as the arranger of the brass section. This excellent musician produced Abigail Khubeka’s album, *Songs of My People* (1983).

During the SABC’s first and second Astera Awards he was conductor of the broadcaster’s resident band. In 1989 together with pianist Darius Brubeck they formed Afro Cool Concept, a band that toured southern Africa as well as the US, Thailand and Europe. He was later replaced by bassist Bongani Sokhela who joined the other members of the group, Barney Rachabane (sax) and Lulu Gontsana (drums). ACC’s recent release was *Still On My Mind* (Sheer Sound). When Dr Nelson Mandela was released, Mhleli co-wrote the welcome song, *The People Want Mandela* for the project, Viva Music For New South Africans. He featured on Ringo Madlingozi’s *Buyisa* and released his album *Heritage* (2004), which was nominated in MTN SAMA 11’s Best Contemporary Jazz Album category. His other passion is organising, arranging, directing and conducting music as seen with the Music Lab production, *Mzansi Sings a Tribute To OR Tambo*, which fused jazz, choral and traditional music. The production consisted of an 18-piece big band, thirty voices and ten strings. The cherry on top was the narrator, poet Jessica Mbangeni whose oratory was complemented by traditional dancers. Some of the established musicians featured included Barney Rachabane, Lawrance Mtshiza, Sydney Mavundla and Feya Faku. Following a tour of the UK and Europe, they performed at Oliver Tambo’s 90th birthday commemoration on 27th October 2007 at Walter Sisulu University’s Zamakulungisa Hall in the Eastern Cape’s Mthatha.

**Dorothy Masuka** became known as “Queen Of Kwela”. She earned the title for dominating the kwela music scene with hits like *Ntsokolo*. She was born in Bulawayo, Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) on 3 September 1935 to Wilson Masuku and Liza Mafuyani. Wilson was a descendant of the Lozi people of western Zambia and Liza was Zulu. The fourth in a family of seven, young
Dorothy experienced health problems while a pupil in her country of birth and it was recommended that she be transferred to another mission school, St Thomas in Johannesburg, South Africa. It was at this Catholic school that her talent shone so bright that at the age of 12 she was already singing in the legendary African Jazz And Variety Show in the fifties. While visiting her aunt in Pimville, she met her heroine Dolly Rathebe who inspired her.

Dorothy had first tasted the power of the microphone when agents from Troubadour invited her for studio auditioning sessions and later joined the African Ink Spots of Philemon Mogotsi. After a tour the school authorities threatened her with punishment and next time they heard about her she was singing with the Golden Rhythm Crooners back in Zimbabwe. After negotiations between Troubadour and St Thomas the record company’s engineer, Stewart Cook travelled to Bulawayo where he made recordings of Dorothy and her group. After the company had signed guardianship agreements with her mother, she came back to Johannesburg.

Among the songs Cook recorded at Stanley Hall was a composition Dorothy wrote on one of her train trips between Bulawayo and Johannesburg – Hamba Notsokolo. It became the biggest hit of her career. On her return she toured with the Harlem Swingsters. From there she followed in the footsteps of her idol, Dolly Rathebe with whom she featured in the legendary 61-cast member African Jazz Revue And Variety Show of Alf Herbert touring the country and beyond. The show exposed black performers to white record companies, theatre and films. Her professional rival at that time was her friend, Miriam Makeba. Some of her backing vocalists were Mabel Mafuya and Mary Thobela. Dorothy’s musical stardom caused her the original surname and she became Masuka. Her Troubadour producer, Cuthbert Matumba was on top of his game and the company’s marketing and distribution strategies were the best. Her recording of the songs Dr Malan and Lumumba turned her into an enemy of the South African regime. She stayed in Malawi and Tanzania supporting the political struggles of those countries. She speaks fluent Swahili due to her stay in Kenya. In 1960 “Dotty” went to the UK where she stayed in Kensington, London promoting her African sound. Her first show there was in Scotland organised by Joe Mogotsi’s wife, Pearl Corner. After her UK and US tours she returned to Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) only to flee again into Zambia this time. Here she spent the next 16 years continuing with her career.

In 1965 Dorothy played in the Caiphus Semenya written and directed musical Buwa. By 1968 she was a regular at Zambia’s Woodpecker Club. In 1969 she came out tops at the Pan-African Cultural Festival in Algiers. When Robert Mugabe’s party toppled Ian Smith’s regime in 1981, she returned to the land of her birth where she sang in night-clubs with groups like Job’s Combination. This prolific songwriter’s other composition, Kulala was included on Miriam Makeba’s performances recorded on a CD titled En Public a Paris et Conakry. In
the mid-eighties she was part of that legendary Botswana solidarity show, the Cultural Resistance Festival.

After the De Klerk government had handed over the reins to the ANC, she was finally allowed to enter the new country of her old days. Her return was facilitated by Gallo Records’ Albert Ralulimi and Rob Allingham. Everything that she knew in the industry had drastically changed and her musical home had closed doors in 1969. In 1990 she recorded her album, *Pata Pata*. She also went into the Marco Studios, Bryanston with producers Sello Chicco Twala and Abe Sibiya to re-record her golden hits like *Imali Yami* on a six-track CD titled *Magumede*, engineered by Bheki Twala. In 2001 she featured in a special show with Don Laka in London. Later she again entered the monumental Downtown studios with producer Dumisani Dlamini to record *Mzilikazi* (Gallo Records, 2001) and released it through her former rival record company, Gallo Records. My personal favourite on the album remains *Igoli*. The album was nominated in the Best Producer category of SAMA 8. One man who also played a pivotal role in the recording of the album is a man I had come to call the industry’s “walking encyclopaedia”, Albert Ralulimi. In my days as a deejay I used to draw a lot of wisdom and knowledge from him. “Bra Kid Mawrongwrong” was one of the few from that era who could still tell yellow from red. When I started writing this book he was one of the first elders I consulted. “Bra Ali” received a Lifetime Achievement Award together with “Gruesome Grash” David Gresham and the late Princess Magogo KaDinizulu from SAMA 8. Albert Ralulimi sadly passed away in 2005 after postponing one of our appointments due to ill-health. May his soul rest in peace.

I guess Mum D’s greatest moment was when MTN SAMA 11 honoured her with a Lifetime Achievement Award together with fellow music stars Sipho Mabuse, Brenda Fassie and Margaret Mcingana; or was it the 1999 Lifetime Achievement Award she received with other grand dames of song, Thandi Klaasen, Abigail Khubeka, Sophie Mgci and Margaret Singana from PSG, Anchor Life and SABC 2? But what I’m sure of is that one of her recent great performances was Bob Mintzer’s Melodi International Jazz Festival at Sun City featuring her with Sibongile Khumalo, Gloria Bosman, Thandi Klaasen, Abigail Khubeka and Sylvia Mdunyelwa. In 2002 she was once again in London promoting the compilation CD, *The Definitive Collection*. Another great collection of her music is on *Hamba Notsokolo And Other Hits From the 50s*. Her 2005 release was *Lendaba* (This Matter) featuring tracks like *Into Yami* (*Ngiyayithanda*) and *Yombela Yombela*. Dorothy “Notsokolo” Masuka remains one of South Africa’s prolific songwriters. In 2006 President Thabo Mbeki honoured her with the Order of Ikhamanga.

**Busi Mhlongo** grew up in Inanda, Durban, and started singing at a very young age. She later impressed judges at Gallo’s King Kong contest singing *My Boy Lollipop* and won. This high priestess of song who used to be known as...
Vicky Mhlongo toured southern Africa with her band, African Jazz. When her ancestors called upon her to become a sangoma, she went for the initiation in Empangeni, KwaZulu-Natal in 1981. She was in London in 1972 where she recorded with the likes of Dudu Pukwana, Julian Bahula and George Lee. She also worked with supergroup Osibisa as lead vocalist. It was after her performances in Mozambique that she left for Portugal with the group, Conjunto Juan Paulo. That was the launch of her international career. She stayed abroad and performed in Portugal, Belgium, Canada, US, etc. She worked with some of her compatriots like Caiphus Semenya. Busi was married to jazzman Early Mabuza of the Early Mabuza Trio fame. In 1996 she returned to her motherland in style as she launched her album, Babhemu (Munich Records, 1994) locally and shamed the industry’s doubting Thomases as the album was well-received by her people. Through Melt 2000 she released her bombshell, Urban Zulu (2000) featuring the hit Yehlisani Umoya.

In 2003 Busi released Freedom and went on to win the Best Female Artist southern Africa of the Koras. Working with her band Twasa, she blends maskandi, mbaqanga, jazz and pop to create a unique sound that captures the mind, heart and soul of her fans. The popularity of Urban Zulu necessitated its subsequent remix as Urban Zulu: The Remixes. Busi’s CD Indiza (2002) was nominated SAMA 9’s Best Dance Album. In 2005 MELT released Spotlight On Busi Mhlongo. Back in the seventies she was diagnosed with cancer and treated, but once back home the disease re-surfaced. In 2007 attempts were made by her fellow musicians to raise funds towards the treatment of the dreaded breast cancer. It was the SABC’s Vuka Sizwe Benefit Concert (Green Project) staged in her honour on Sunday, 28 October 2007 at the Old Joburg Station in the Newtown Precinct, which managed to raise funds for her medical bills. The concert, which was the first of many to follow in honour of different musicians was also attended by President Thabo Mbeki and his wife, Zanele who wished her well on her 60th birthday. The artist line-up included Thandiswa Mazwai, Siphozazi Maraqana, Simphiwe Dana, Sibongile Khumalo, Zuluboy, Shana, Shaluza, Somizi Mhlongo, Deborah Frazer, Dorothy Masuka, Leonie Jansen, Gloria Bosman, Ringo Madlingozi, Ray Phiri and others. The DVD of the Busi Mhlongo Benefit Concert titled Vuka Sizwe was nominated for MTN SAMA 14 in the Best Traditional/African Adult Contemporary DVD category.

Thoko Mdlalose was born and bred in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. Her talent was obvious at a young age and family and friends motivated her to follow her dream. She started her career with mbaqanga music. It was when she was with Izintombi Zentuthuko that she toured extensively. Some of the bands she joined include Mthunzini Girls and the Durban Jazz Sledge. Things started to shine even brighter when she became part of the African Jazz Revue And Variety Show where she met most of South Africa’s rising stars. In 1971 she left for the US for better opportunities and growth. She joined Mongo Santamaria’s group.
as singer and dancer adding some African touch to the shows. Later she formed her own group, African Vibrations, which toured the US and Europe. Besides their music, they distinguished themselves through their African regalia. Her recordings include Brave New Day, which was recorded in Holland as well as Let's Have A Good Time (Teal Records), a Richard Siluma production. Thoko's contributions on other musicians' albums include her translation of Stevie Wonder's Ngiculela from his album Songs In The Key Of Life.

In 1975 a self-taught young pianist arrived in Johannesburg to work with groups like The Drive. His name was Bheki Mseleku. He was born in March 1955 to William and Elvira Mseleku of Amanzimtoti, KwaZulu-Natal. He had perfected his piano playing skills at the Nokwe home in Kwa-Mashu, Durban. Some of his early compositions include The Drive's I Have A Dream. In the early eighties he left the country for Zimbabwe. In 1985 when Hugh Masekela toured Zimbabwe he invited him to join him in Botswana where he featured on tenor sax and keyboards during the recording of Hugh's second Jive Records album Waiting For The Rain. Later the jazz maestro who lost two of his right hand fingers in an accident at a young age moved to London. Mseleku who is spiritually guided in his work sees himself as a medium and regards music as a ritual. He worked with a number of seasoned musicians and toured Europe and the UK extensively. Some of the albums he recently featured on include Jonas Gwangwa’s Flowers Of The Nation (Sony Music, 2001). The “gentle genius” played piano and saxophone on the album that was recorded at London’s Raazor Studios. Mseleku who plays piano, tenor and alto saxophone also released his own albums, which include Celebration (1991), nominated in the British Mercury Music Prize for the Album Of The Year category; a live recording, Meditations (1992); Timelessness (1994); Star Seedings (1995); Beauty Of Sunrise (1997) and Home At Last (2003) featuring fellow South African musicians, Winston Mankunku Ngozi and Feya Faku. This keyboard wizard was crowned Best African Instrumentalist by the first Kora All Africa Music Awards staged in South Africa in 1996. In 2005 a compilation CD, The Best Of Bheki Mseleku, was released. By May 2008 when his singer, activist and film guru sister Pinkie was buried in Durban at the age of 67, Bheki was ill. While Pinkie suffered a stroke, he was reported to have been admitted to a hospital in London for complications related to diabetes. Towards the end of June 2008 he was up and ready for a concert scheduled for 11 July at the Royal Festival Hall while also working on a next album.

Among the best jazz bands of the eighties was bassist Carlo Mombelli’s group, The Abstractions. In 1987 he moved to Germany where he performed and taught music in Munich. When he returned to South Africa in 1999 he performed with his group, The Prisoners of Strange. Its members were Siya Makuzeni (trombone/vocals), Jessica Bailey (cello), Marcus Wyatt (trumpet), Sydney Mnisi (soprano/tenor sax) and Lloyd Martin (drums). Some of the albums he featured on locally include Marcus Wyatt’s Gathering (Sheer Sound,

By 2008 Carlo was promoting his latest album at various live show venues including the House of Ntsako in Brixton where he performed alongside Marcus Wyatt and Louis Mhlanga on Friday, 20 June.

One of the great guitarists who played in Carlo Mombelli’s Abstractions in the late eighties was **Johnny Fourie**. He was born Jan Carel Fourie on 18 May 1937 in the Cape, but grew up in Benoni. His mother bought him a guitar and he never looked back. He played in the USA and UK but back home he’ll always be remembered for his Johnny Fourie Band. The band was formed in 1979 and its other members included his son Sean Fourie (keyboards), Raymond Boschoff (drums) and Chris Becker (bass). It was after 1985 that he joined Carlo’s band. In the new democratic South Africa he became a teacher at the Pretoria Technikon in the Jazz Department. He also formed the Short Attention Span Ensemble whose members were Sean, Trevor don Jeany, Barry van Zyl, Dave O’ Higgans and Johnny himself. In 1997 they released *Fingerprints Of The Gods*. Actually, Johnny performed with the who’s who of South African jazz. He was from the generation that boasted musicians like The Manhattan Brothers and Spokes Mashiane. He also worked for the South African Music Rights Organisation (SAMRO). Johnny passed away in mid-August, 2007 after releasing the CD *Once Upon A Time*.

In the mid-eighties a young man from Sharpeville, South Africa, **Vernon Molefe**, was experimenting on sound in the studios of Los Angeles studios. At the age of 20 he had already performed with established musicians like Caiphus Semenya and the Crusaders (Joe Sample, Wayne Henderson, Wilton Felder, and Stix Hooper). Vernon had studied music at the Duke Ellington School Of Performing Arts. He played piano and could write and read music. His talent led to his contribution on the Crusaders album, *Ghetto Blaster*. Though he died at a young age, he had recorded albums like *A Letter To America, Banana Lady, Free Spirit* and a self-titled album. It is sad that he passed away at such a young age. His close friend in the US was another talented young musician from Soweto, South Africa Lebo M aka Lebohang Morake.

When I was a young deejay in the mid-eighties one of the dynamic groups of the time was **Thami and The M Bees**. It was a family group of the Mbele siblings. One unique aspect of the group was that it operated well despite the fact that the members were in different continents, separated by the sea.
Some members were in South Africa while some were abroad – determination and commitment! Many of us would have had a reason to fold up due to the distances between, but the Mbele siblings saw the bigger picture. They would post a cassette to the other members across the ocean until the project was ripe to record. Thami, Nonkonzo and Mbuso recently joined hands to help their sister Cosbie release her CD, Let’s Unite. She conceived the title while in New York on 11 September 2001 as the World Trade Centre was attacked “to remind mankind that we’re looking for peace now whether we’re in South Africa, America, Pakistan, Palestine, Iraq, etc.” to quote from the sleeve cover of the album. She co-produced the album with her brother, Thami. Cosbie who’s been a lecturer at the University Of New York for over ten years is passionate about choral music. Her other albums include Mother Of The Nation.

Lebo Morake is the pride of African Music who has made it into the world of big-time theatre and films. His involvement with The Lion King, which broke all known box office records opened so many doors for local films. This was evidenced when South African films like Yesterday starring Leleti Khumalo, U-Carmen eKhayelitsha starring Pauline Malefane, Zola Maseko’s Drum as well as Gavin Hood’s Tsotsi. By 2005 the Lion King project had employed more than 80 South Africans. Lebohang Morake was born in Tladi Location, Soweto to a singer and an actress. His talent in music started showing at the age of four singing on street corners. Before long he was playing with established bands in Orlando East’s Pelican. Some of the great names he performed with were Mara Louw and the late Ben “Satch” Masinga. In 1978 he recorded his debut single Celebration and to promote it he embarked on a two week tour of Cape Town. Later he toured Lesotho with his friend, the late Vernon Molefe, where they did shows mostly in night clubs. Following their bigger dreams, the two left for the US where they enrolled at the Duke Ellington School Of The Arts in Washington DC as well as the Metropolitan School Of The Arts in Syracuse, New York. They teamed up with Muntu Semenya to form Accent, a group that staged shows in the East Coast. He later went solo using the name Lebo M and settled in Hollywood, California. Among the groups he worked with were The Crusaders on whose album Ghettoblaster he featured. In 1985 he released a maxi single Musukulandela/Can You Believe It? on the WEA label produced by Vernon Molefe. He composed, arranged and co-produced the songs. Lebo was part of the musicians who recorded Caiphus Semenya’s 1994 album, Woman Got A Right To Be at the Bop Recording Studios in Mmabatho. His 1997 release was the album Deeper Meaning. Today he is an international celebrity who has won various awards mostly for his music collaboration with Elton John and Tim Rice in The Lion King (1994). On 6 June 2007 when the musical opened in South Africa, he co-produced it with Pieter Toerien. Hosted by Teatro at Montecasino in Fourways, Johannesburg for more than six months, its cast included Sello Maake Ka Ncube, Buyisile Zama and Mark Rayment.
Let’s round off this superstar’s story with some of the nominations and awards he received due to his talent, hard work and passion.

For *The Lion King*:

- Grammy Award – Best Instrumental Arrangement with Accompanying Vocals
- Academy Award
- Ivor Novello Award
- Tony Award nomination

For other projects:

- Academy Award nomination: *A Long Night’s Journey Into Today* (2001)
- SABC 2 Tribute Achievers Award (2002)
- FNB SAMA – Best Male Vocal Performance: Rhythm Of The Pride Lands