

# South African jazz

Christopher Ballantine

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Though North American influences on black city culture in South Africa predate the 20th century, they found new conduits during and after the 1920s, for example in gramophone records and films. By the early 1930s, black dance bands started to appear, modelling themselves directly on US prototypes. They played not only US (or US-inspired) swing numbers but also their own Marabi -based pieces in swing style. It is this unique and prodigious genre that by the late 1940s came to be known as African jazz or Mbaqanga .

In a symbiotic relationship with these bands were the vaudeville troupes, companies who usually specialized in a variety of musical and theatrical routines. The troupes and bands participated jointly in a genre of all-night entertainment known as 'Concert and Dance'. Like that of the bands, the troupes' repertory was derived from both foreign and local sources.

During the 1950s, such innovations were followed by *kwela*, the extraordinary *marabi*-derived pennywhistle music of the streets, and by a multitude of jazz-based vocal groups. But the apartheid legislation of the 1950s forced the removal of entire black communities, and soon brought the era of the large dance orchestras to an end. Smaller groups, rooted either in bebop or *marabi*, survived for a while.

The apartheid state unleashed a period of unprecedented state repression in 1960, marking politically and culturally the end of an epoch. The exodus of jazz musicians to Europe and the USA began; most never returned. In exile, musicians such as Abdullah Ibrahim (Dollar Brand), Hugh Masekela, Jonas Gwangwa, Chris McGregor, Dudu Pukwana and Johnny Dyani brought South African jazz to the attention of international audiences. At home, however, jazz entered a benighted era. The state radio, and therefore the commercial recording industry, now favoured a new style of *mbaqanga* which was strongly neo-traditional. For many jazz musicians, it was the end of the road.

When a virile, oppositional popular musical culture began to reappear, it did so only because of the re-emergence of black working-class and community politics in the mid-1980s. The revival of jazz was symbolically central to this, and its return to its former popular status was accompanied by years of experimentation and integration. Since the country's first non-racial, democratic elections in 1994, the jazz scene has been dominated by younger players, most of whom continue to seek an individual voice through a fusion of international styles with idioms such as *marabi* that are locally rooted.

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