

**(R)Evolutionary Lows:
Electric Bass Lines in South African Music, 1970 to 1994**

Angus William Hardcastle

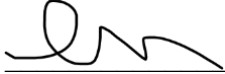
A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Humanities,
University of the Witwatersrand,
in fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Music
Johannesburg, 2025

Abstract

This thesis explores the South African electric bass tradition from 1970 to the early 1990s. It focuses on the careers, early musicking and work of five prominent bass players: Sipho Gumede, Bakithi Kumalo, Fana Zulu, Spencer Mbadu and Carlo Mombelli. These musicians were chosen to broadly sample the developing bass styles within the country's jazz and popular music scenes. Being the first generation of electric bass players to have access to the instrument from a young age they developed the techniques, styles and standards for future generations. My study focuses on the compositional styles, performance techniques and grooves of their work and musicking. I have transcribed and analysed three works from each bass player's body of work, and include two transcriptions of the music of Joseph Makwela, who may be considered the father of South African electric bass. I have also written brief musical biographies of the musicians constructed from in-depth interviews I did with them.

Declaration

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Music at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other university.



Angus Hardcastle

26th March 2025

Contents

	Page
Abstract	ii
Declaration	iii
Acknowledgements	v
List of Music Examples	vi
 Introduction	 1
Chapter 1: Musical Biography	9
Musical Biography History and Theory	
Sipho Gumede	14
Bakithi Kumalo	18
Fana Zulu	21
Spencer Mbadu	25
Carlo Mombelli	27
Instrument, Influences, Pathways and Identities	31
Chapter 2: The Bass in Time with Space	40
Methods	
Joseph Makwela: Towards Electrification	43
Sipho Gumede: Steps ahead	45
Bakithi Kumalo: The local global bass player	52
Fana Zulu: A rock amongst stones	59
Spencer Mbadu: A bassist's bass player	63
Carlo Mombelli: Time tone zen zone	70
Concluding Thoughts: Notes on the Album, <i>Lines</i>	83
Glossary	89
References	92
Discography	98
 Appendix 1: Transcription of interviews	
Appendix 2: Transcriptions of musical works	
Appendix 3: Original scores	
Appendix 4: Track listing of recorded album	

Acknowledgements

I have only gratitude for my patient and ever-supportive supervisor, Professor Grant Olwage. His guidance has been invaluable throughout this process. I would also like to express my sincere thanks to my interviewees—Fana Zulu, Bakithi Kumalo, Vusi Khumalo, and Khaya Mahlangu—for their generosity with their time, without which this thesis would not have been possible. Additionally, I am grateful to Jessie Napier for her thoughtful review of my thesis.

To my band, colleagues, and friends—Godfrey Mntambo, Enoch Marutha, Nicholas Bjorkman, Teboho Kobedi, Dylan Fine, Josh Mokoena, and Frances Michaletos Vdw—I am immensely fortunate to have had the opportunity to collaborate with such talented and dedicated individuals. Your time, energy, and unwavering support have been crucial to this project. Special thanks are due to Enoch Marutha and Nicholas Bjorkman for not only performing on but also mixing and mastering the album *Lines*. I would also like to acknowledge Flame Studios for their generous provision of studio space for the recording of this project.

I owe my deepest gratitude to my mentors, both in music and in life. Spencer Mbadu's presence is with me every time I play my instrument. The extent of his impact on my musical development and personal growth is something I am only beginning to fully appreciate. Spencer, I miss you, and may you rest in peace. I would also like to express my deepest appreciation to Professor Carlo Mombelli, who has served as a mentor, supervisor, interviewee, and, most importantly, a continual source of inspiration. Words cannot describe my gratitude for the years I have spent under your guidance.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the unwavering support of my family—Penny Cooper, Justin Hardcastle, Giles Hardcastle, Samantha Hardcastle and Jessie Doveton. Their encouragement and love have been a constant source of strength, and I am profoundly grateful for their presence in my life.

List of Music Examples

Example 1. Makwela's bass line in "*Uyavutha Umlilo*", Mahlathini and the Mahotella Queens (1971) bars 2-5.

Example 2. Makwela's bass on "*Emanzankeni*" by Makhona Zonke Band (1975) bars 1-6.

Example 3.1. Gumede's bass on Confusions by Spirits Rejoice (1978) bars 39-40.

Example 3.2. Gumede's bass on 'Confusions' Spirits Rejoice (1978) bars 65-71.

Example 4.1. "Kuniswa Kudedelwane" by Sakhile (1982) bars 33-39.

Example 4.2. "Kuniswa Kudedelwane" by Sakhile (1982) bars 66-69.

Example 5.1. "When Days are Dark Friends are Few" by Sipho Gumede (1997) bars 99-101.

Example 5.2. "When Days are Dark Friends are Few" by Sipho Gumede (1997) bars 119-121.

Example 6.1. Kumalo's Bass on "Dark streets, Bad night" by Thetha (1986) bars 105-122.

Example 6.2. Kumalo's Bass on "Dark streets, Bad night" by Thetha (1986) bars 187-197.

Example 7.1. Kumalo's Bass on "You Can Call Me Al" by Paul Simon (1986) bars 89-91.

Example 8.1. Kumalo's Bass on "Papa" by Sankomata (1989) bars 18-21.

Example 8.2. Kumalo's Bass on "Papa" by Sankomata (1989) bars 107-109.

Example 8.3. Kumalo's Bass on "Papa" by Sankomata (1989) bars 152-159.

Example 9.1. Zulu's bass in "*Mbombela*" by Bayete (1987) bars 4-12.

Example 9.2. Zulu's bass in "*Mbombela*" by Bayete (1987) bars 133-134.

Example 10.1. Zulu's bass in "Mountain Shade" by Moses Taiwa Molelekwa (1994) bars 32-49.

Example 10.2. Zulu's bass in "Mountain Shade" by Moses Taiwa Molelekwa (1994) bars 218-228.

Example 10.3. Zulu's bass in "Mountain Shade" by Moses Taiwa Molelekwa (1994) bars 292-297.

Example 11.1. Mbadu's bass in "Bayi Lam" by Abdullah Ibrahim (1991) bars 68-72.

Example 11.2. Mbadu's bass in "Bayi Lam" by Abdullah Ibrahim (1991) bars 88-92.

Example 12.1. Mbadu's bass in "Tsakwe/Royal Blue" by Abdullah Ibrahim (1991) bars 4-5.

Example 12.2. Mbadu's bass in "Tsakwe/Royal Blue" by Abdullah Ibrahim (1991) bars 70-71.

Example 12.3. Mbadu's bass in "Tsakwe/Royal Blue" by Abdullah Ibrahim (1991) bars 118-126.

Example 12.4. Mbadu's bass in "Tsakwe/Royal Blue" by Abdullah Ibrahim (1991) bars 160-164.

Example 13.1. "My Friends and I" by Carlo Mombelli (1990) bar 23.

Example 13.2. "My Friends and I" by Carlo Mombelli (1990) bar 30.

Example 14.1. "Remember Lucia" by Carlo Mombelli (1993) bars 32-37.

Example 14.2. "Remember Lucia" by Carlo Mombelli (1993) bars 57-58.

Example 14.3. "Remember Lucia" by Carlo Mombelli (1993) bars 72-74.

Example 15.1. "Dancing in Museum" by Carlo Mombelli (1993) bars 48-55.

Example 15.2. "Dancing in Museum" by Carlo Mombelli (1993) bars 63-72.

Example 15.3. "Dancing in Museum" by Carlo Mombelli (1993) bars 73-79.

Introduction

To begin I want to explore my personal connections to this research and its subject matter. Growing up my family made frequent overseas moves, dividing my young life into four distinct phases determined by where we lived: London, Shanghai, and Sydney, only coming home to Cape Town in 2007. As a result, my early perspective on South Africa came from my parents' stories about their young lives and leftist student politics. My mother was a devoted activist, and my father was a human rights lawyer during apartheid. A common way for white South African men to avoid being drafted into the army was to study for as long as possible and that's what my father did. In 1988 he did his masters in law at the London School of Economics, beginning our family's journey around the world.

My formal musical education began in Sydney, Australia, where I started to learn the trumpet at the age of eight. I lost interest in the instrument upon returning to South Africa when I was ten. I was a foul-mouthed troublemaker thrown into attending the oldest school in the country SACS, in Cape Town. This bastion of southern suburbs' white society showed me that neo-liberal apartheid – its ideologies, hierarchies, and social class structures – were active and thriving with a fresh coat of post-apartheid rainbow paint. It seemed that not much had changed in the southern suburbs where my parents grew up, despite significant economic development and the beginnings of racial integration in the first decade of the twentieth century. A lack of affordable housing, a stagnant tourism-based economy, and intentional city planning meant that wealth and the city centre remained largely inaccessible to its lower income, largely black and coloured, peoples (Tourk et al., 2021: 71-90). I observed and participated in the economically dominant white minority society which maintained Western culture as a sort of untouchable standard, resulting in continued cultural exclusivity.

Around this time I picked up the bass. I fell in love immediately. At first, I refused lessons or to play for the school band; the instrument was my creative outlet. Jaco Pastorius, Marcus Miller, Stanley Clarke, and Victor Wooten were my early idols. I was quickly drawn to improvisation, slapping,¹ and the more technical features of the instrument. My elder brother and his best friend were generous enough to include me in their band so we started an instrumental band. I left SACS and opted for the small progressive high school Cedar House. There was no music at the school so I went to the legendary Jazz Workshop in the city centre.

¹ See the Glossary for a definition of the slap technique.

I had discovered Charles Mingus by then and knew I wanted to study jazz and began learning upright bass. I was 13 at this point. Rusty the receptionist sent me to the fourth floor of the awfully old and thin building that housed the Jazz Workshop, and I remember frequently knocking my upright bass as I went up the awkward staircase. When I got to the top, Spencer Mbadu was waiting for me. He was a world of information, and an amazing teacher who used to sing and play the piano while I played the upright. I only really heard him play electric bass a few years later when he encouraged me to bring mine one week. He and Mike Perry became my first window into the world of South African jazz.

Mbadu was a kind, enthusiastic and warm teacher. The lightness of his character was deceptive, and as I grew older, I began to realise his stature, not only because of his musicality but also because of the respect he garnered from other musicians. My experience was not unique, and many other musicians and bass players benefitted from his generosity. He passed away in September 2023, before I could interview him for this research, although I had interviewed him for an Honours research project in 2020.

A couple of months after starting lessons with Mbadu, Dylan Fine began chatting with me to become the new bassist for his rock/funk band The Liminals. Fine was a first-year UCT jazz student at the time and was an important mentor to me. I performed with the band between the ages of 14 and 19 which enabled me to tour around the country, playing at festivals such as Rocking the Daisies, Oppikoppi, Up the Creek, Smoking Dragon, and many others. All the while I was studying bass with Mbadu. At 16 I realised I needed to improve my theory in order to study jazz more formally and was fortunate to work with Mike Perry (Winston Mankunku's pianist) who would jam with me after our theory lessons and who opened my ears to the sounds of Ornette Coleman, Chick Corea, Abdullah Ibrahim, Joe Henderson and John Coltrane. He also gave me every single Winston Mankunku album.

After much deliberation during a gap year after school during which I worked as a student teacher at a high school I decided to escape the Cape Town bubble, and moved to Johannesburg to study with my favourite South African composer and bass player Carlo Mombelli at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits). Upon my arrival, Mombelli helped me with a real effort of kindness, and instilled in me the discipline I needed to clean up my playing up and expand my artistic horizons. Saxophonist Godfrey Mntambo and I met during my first week at Wits, and after a couple of years and many gigs together we started a band The Kopano Jazz Collective. I have been living and working as a bassist in Johannesburg, my

adopted home, for eight years now. Working and performing in South Africa I found that accessing information about local bass playing difficult. If I hadn't been privileged enough to encounter my mentors, I wouldn't have a career in music. So, consolidating and making South African bass history and techniques more accessible is both a personal endeavour and anticipation of the needs of other local musicians particularly bass players.

Research Formalities: Aim, Rationale, Methods

This research attempts to establish a provisional and partial genealogy of the South African electric bass for the 1970s to the early 1990s, exploring the contributions of five prominent electric bass players: Sipho Gumede, Bakhiti Kumalo, Fana Zulu, Spencer Mbadu and Carlo Mombelli. By tracking their influences and tracing the development of musical ideas between them (and other musicians they work(ed) with), I hope to connect the musical dots, and in doing so present both a more thorough understanding of their practice and the music they individually created and performed; as well as show how their “musicking”, or bassing, contributes to a tradition of South African bass playing. Musicking is “to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing” (Small, 1998: 9). The implications of Christopher Small’s rethinking of music as a verb means that we understand it as a social act connecting its various participants, and as a ritual that helps people to negotiate social meaning and identities (Small, 1998:7-15).

The thesis consists of two chapters, with the first focussing on the bassists’ musical biographies, and the second an analysis of select compositions based on fifteen transcriptions I did. The transcriptions are included in an appendix (Appendix 2). The aim of the musical biography is to gain insight into the bassists’ musical learning, track their influences and significant learning experiences. The analytical work endeavours to give insight into the musicians’ musical language and the individual styles particular to the bassists.

My research attempts to address the following main question, for the period roughly between 1970 and 1994: what are the prominent South African electric bass playing perspectives and styles and how did they develop? Sub-questions are: what are the harmonic and rhythmic tendencies both individual and generic to South Africa? How did these bassists learn the instrument and arrive at their individual styles? And what are the relationships between these individual bassists’ practice and sound? I can only partially answer these research questions

as there are of course as many styles and stories as there are bass players. This research, then, aims to create a basis for further transcription, analysis and research into the lives and musicking of South African bassists, building on the research of Shaun Johannes (2010).

The practical and creative side of this study consists of an album of music I conceptualised, composed, performed, and recorded inspired by the work of the musicians who are the subject of this research. My goal was not to replicate their compositional and bass playing influences but rather to take ideas from them to assimilate into my own compositional practice, thereby participating in the lineage of South African bass music. I write about my compositional work further at the end of the thesis, and the recordings and scores of my compositions are appended to the thesis.

The lineage of South African bass does not start with any one bass player. It begins, one might argue, long before the electric or jazz (upright) bass with the traditional musics of South Africa. The *uhadi* and other string instruments have been prevalent in South African traditional musics for thousands of years (Thorpe, 2018:26). Local vocal traditions such as *isicathamiya* and the bass vocalisations in genres such as *mbube* can be directly linked to modern bass styles in their use of vocal slides, polyrhythm, melodic content and rhythmic approach (Thorpe, 2018:27-30).

Genres like *ghoema*, *kwela*, *mbaqanga*, *tsabatsaba*, *maskanda* and *marabi*² developed out of colonial social-political conditions (including oppression, cultural erasure and rapid urbanisation) while being influenced by indigenous music practices, both in terms of their instrumentation and musical style (Thorpe, 2018:30-38). The plywood one-string bass used in genres like *kwela* is an example of the results of these conditions (Martin, 2013:139). Early big band *mbaqanga* of the 1930s and 1940s saw the first integration of upright bass in South African jazz (Ballantine, 1991:132). This early history of jazz in South Africa and how it interacted with local musics has not been exhaustively recorded so the possible and various types of influence of traditional musics on bass performance is difficult to establish (Thorpe, 2018:30-31). Martin refers to the process of ‘creolisation’, that is the melding of imported slave cultures with indigenous and the colonisers’ cultures, that shaped South African musics (2013:90-91). Later, as these genres developed bass players began to adapt and change their varied influences to suit the new instrument.

² See Glossary for definitions of genres.

There is another blank spot in the research on South African music: the electric bass. Gwen Ansell's obituary for Pat Mokoka aptly relates this: "We rarely consider how important the sound of the bass is to a band's identity. Mokoka's bass voice was one such shaping sound. Yet there are no histories recording those vital chains of community" (2021). The reasons for and value of my research on bassists is amplified by the difficulties in accessing aspects of their histories and the time-sensitive nature of such work. Since starting this project two prominently featured musicians have passed away: Spencer Mbadu and Joseph Makwela. A good example of what I hope my work accomplishes is Billy Monama's textbook-type *Introduction to South African Guitar Styles*, volume 1. I consider this thesis the first step in cataloguing, analysing and making more accessible the South African bass tradition as Monama has done for the guitar. Sello Galane's testimonial summarises its impact.

Monama patiently presents his ground-breaking study of South African guitar styles through practical demonstrations of stylistic features and unique techniques that characterise our music over time. This documentation is rich and unique in its novelty and will enrich music education in South Africa and the world immensely (2021).

To this end I have chosen to focus on five of the most impactful and representative of South African electric bassists during the time my research covers. These musicians are not all well-known and like many South African musicians are under credited by the industry and academia for their contributions to the art form (Devroop and Walton, 2007:7). Often overshadowed by well-known figures that dominate the narrative they seldom appear (or are mentioned in passing) in the seminal South African music history texts such as David Coplan's *In Township Tonight* (2007), Gwen Ansell's *Soweto Blues* (2004) and Denis-Constant Martin's *Sounding the Cape* (2013).

Martin primarily writes about Cape Town-based bassists and/or upright bass players such as Johnny Gertze, Basil Moses and Gerald 'Mac' McKenzie. Coplan often mentions Gumede (2007) and Ansell interviewed Mombelli and wrote about Gumede (2004). But in general there is little accessible and detailed information about their techniques, styles and biographies (with the exception of Mbadu in Johannes (2010)). The reason I chose the timeframe (1970 to the early 1990s) of this research is because it was a sort of coming of age

for the electric bass; instead of upright bass players or guitarist trying it out (as was common earlier). It this was the first generation to have access to the electric bass from a young age.

This work is thus part of an ongoing effort to preserve, archive and document South African jazz and popular music history and its music, and participates in long tradition of such scholarship, including (to name a few): Chatradari Devroop and Chris Walton's *Unsung* (2007), Lindelwa Dalamba's writings (2006; 2013; 2016), Sello Galane's PhD on Philip Tabane (2009), and projects such as York University's SA jazz history archive (Eato). Not only will my interviews and the brief musical biographies record the histories of the bass players I write about but the transcription and analysis encourage discourse and engagement with the music itself. The bass as an instrument and bass players deserve the same careful consideration that other more prominent musicians and instruments have received.

The design for this research, which takes a qualitative approach, draws on conventional methodologies for music studies. At the beginning of Chapter 1 I briefly discuss general theories of musical biography, including jazz biography, and focus on features of oral history to conclude the section on biographical theory. I engage with oral history because the primary method of data collection for this chapter relied on extensive interviews with the bassists (transcriptions of which appear in several appendices to the thesis) in order to sketch aspects of their musical life stories.

Fundamentally the short musical biographies of the bassists in Chapter 1 serve to inform the analysis of musical material in Chapter 2. The musical learning and career trajectories of the bassists sketched in Chapter 1 are crucial to understanding the development of their styles which is analysed in the following chapter. This by extension informs our knowledge of the musical and cultural movements of the time. Chapter 2 includes an overview of the methods employed in the chapter, primarily the transcription and music analysis of bass lines, which in part focuses on groove given the importance of the concept and practice to bass musicking. I discuss some of the literature on groove there.

I interviewed five important figures in South African bass history in 2024: Bhakiti Kumalo, Vusi Khumalo, Khaya Mahlangu, Carlo Mombelli and Fana Zulu; and relied on earlier interviews I had done with Spencer Mbadu. I drew on a range methodological literature on interviewing (see Beatty and Willis, 2007; Koven, 2014; Willink and Shukri, 2018), informed by ideas on what has been called performative, cognitive, expert, and intersectional

interviewing. Perhaps the most directly applicable mode to this study is expert interviewing which considers how to interpret and ascertain information from those who are highly knowledgeable in a particular subject (Döringer, 2021:256). Being aware of social context and positionality in a society as complex as South Africa is essential, and intersectional thinking better recognises the interlocking oppressions that stratify society and the worlds in which my informants worked and lived (Cuadrez and Uttal, 1999:159). Features of these modes of interviewing compel me to consider my own position as a researcher.

Positionality

I end this Introduction by reflecting on my position as a practicing bassist and researcher in terms of my research topic and subjects. There is a school of thought that argues that being a young white male I should not be researching what is predominantly Black music of a different generation. This is an important point, and one of contention, as much of the academic literature on South African jazz has been written by white musicologists.

Lara Allen was in a similar position to mine in researching black, older female South African jazz musicians and explored the ethical implications of doing such research. Dabi Nkululeko and Desiree Lewis argue that the power dynamics and mastery of those researching the represented party means that white women representing black women may entrench the (racist) positions of power and representation; for example, that white scholars observe, explain and create the norms, and blacks express, feel and respond (in Allen 2008:55). Allen argues that this is an essentialist perspective assuming that an ‘insider’ has exclusive access to truth. Other feminist scholars have argued that this entrenches ethnocentrism (2008:57). Allen suggests a solution to this: consultation with and representation of the opinions of the subjects on the theoretical arguments; in other words, an abdication of scholarly authority (2008:70). Allen consulted 70 participants including Dorothy Masuka, Rebecca Malope, Sibongile Khumalo and bass player Lipalesa Lebabo. For Allen it was the lack of language skills that was the main disadvantage of being a white researcher (2008:67).

A strong argument for the validity and necessity of my research was made by Allen’s interviewees Khumalo and Lebabo, who commented to her that there was no black researcher writing about them at the time (2008:61). Shaun Johannes is the only other South African bass player to cover a similar topic to mine, although he focuses on ghoema and Cape Town bassists (2010). As I noted earlier there must be a recognition of the inevitable restriction on

the time researchers have to access the oral testimony of older musicians. It is urgent to document their lives and work.

While my position is and continues to be that of an outsider to some of my research subjects in certain ways (I'm white, young, I don't speak their home languages), I feel the practical nature of my research that focuses on transcription, music analysis of compositional style and performance technique, and which are core to my own professional identity and skillset, offsets the danger of creating misinformed narratives about the bassists' musicking.

In her research Ceri Moelwyn-Hughes discusses identity for female South African musicians between 1994 and 2012. Particularly applicable to me is the section on race and nationality. She found that working across racial and cultural boundaries was a normalised part of most of her informants' musical careers; and this has been my experience too thus far (2012:78-79). Indeed I have been encouraged by my mentors and peers to study, perform and write about Black South African music genres. Racism (and misogyny) is rampant within the broader music industry and so creating respect and appreciation for local genres and the musicians who have been seminal in developing those genres – in part by documenting their lives and work – is an important part of countering industry racism.³

A less common part of my identity as a South African musician that impacts my research position is my upbringing overseas. Moelwyn-Hughes cites examples of foreign-born musicians who have contributed to the local music scene.⁴ Some have found a musical life in their adopted home, choosing to engage with a culture and music that was not their own by birth but was responsible for their growth development as a musician (2012:96-97). I find myself in a similar position, and so despite my foreignness, resulting strange accent and whiteness I want to give back to a place, people, and its musics that have given me so much. I have dedicated my craft to understanding the development of lower frequencies in music. The bass is my life and I feel fortunate that I landed in South Africa, a mecca of bass and superlative bass musicians, musicking, and music.

³ There are many examples of positive allyship in the history of South African music. For jazz, these include Chris McGregor, Mike Perry, Buddy Wells, Kevin Gibson, Marc Duby and Kevin Davidson.

⁴ For example Franka Insinger was born in the Netherlands grew up in Indonesia and fell in love with South African jazz, playing for Sankomota and studying South African jazz (2012:95).

Chapter 1: Musical Biography

In this chapter I present brief musical biographies of the musicians who are the subject of this study. First, I write about them individually and then, drawing on aspects of their combined musical biographies, I construct an interconnected narrative to show a window into the development of electric bass performance in South African popular music and jazz. To analyse the interviews and information I have collected, I first address relevant theoretical approaches to biography that have developed in music studies. Important concepts, theories, and methods particularly relevant to this thesis are jazz biography (South African and American), oral history, and lifelong learning.

History and Theory of Musical Biography

Musical biography has been largely shaped by nineteenth-century enlightenment thinking, based on the assumption that the past can be reconstructed through an objective scientific lens (Pekacz, 2004:5). Many attempts have been made to write accurate accounts of a musician's life, some focusing on the political and social contexts in which the artist worked while others focus on the music (Pekacz, 2004:6). However, much of conventional musical biography has also been devoid of detailed technical music analysis (Wiley, 2010:5). This approach has largely avoided criticism until recently whereas now biographies are thought of as a construction of the biographer and the intellectual and political contexts in which they write rather than 'simply' being a reconstruction of 'true' history, no matter how rigorous the method (Pekacz, 2004:19). The classic approach often led to convenient omissions such as divorcing of art from the artist's life, for example the brushing aside of Wagner's strongly held Nazi convictions (Wiley, 2010:4-5).

This issue has been perpetuated by tendencies towards fetishising authenticity, exhibitionism and narcissism in stories of famous musicians (Pekacz, 2006:1). Despite classical musical biography's shortfalls in perpetuating 'great man' history and celebrating individuals, biographical study remains an important contextualising mechanism. A biography has the potential to reshape cultural memory (Pekacz, 2004:8-9), because even the writing of a biography is an act of entering a subject into written discourse, which can affect cultural eminence, contextualise social action, alter political influence (Codell, 2001:3). They have been used in the past to separate artists to a higher plane of existence from the everyday and create them as symbols of a nation (Codell, 2001:14-15). This was predicated on a view of art that assumed music can be categorised as good and bad, for example Adorno's criticism of

jazz (and all pop music) as bad music fundamentally driven by commercialism (Gracyk, 1992: 528). Christopher Wiley is critical of tropes that have developed in musical biography, such as the great last work, the male and heterosexual homogenous historical narratives, binary competitive relationship between two great composers or a muse (lover) leading to heightened creativity. He suggests two solutions to this issue: widely compare biographical sources to see if tropes are being adopted and avoid authors' attachment to the subject affecting the analysis (2010:15).

As with the biographies of classical composers, jazz biography has its own tropes and problem areas. Aimed at 'legitimising' the genre as serious or art music (Pinheiro, 2023:70), early jazz biography saw the prevalence of spiritual mythologising, rags to riches and tortured artist narratives. They often avoided social context and music analysis (Perchard, 2007:123). Comparisons to classical musicians through spiritual narratives attempted to justify the value of jazz with reference to Western art music. Absorbing them into the Western musicological hegemony the mythology around the American dream also informed a number of these tropes (Perchard, 2007:124). Early European and American jazz scholarship was also later criticised "by musicians and scholars for focusing on theory, such as chord-scale relations, and for neglecting other vital aspects of the music such as sound, interpretation, articulation, dynamics, interaction between musicians and audiences, and spirituality" (Pinheiro, 2022:271). Beyond this many disseminated racial stereotypes causing damage to both Black people and the genre (Perchard, 2007:128).

According to Perchard the later (in the 1970s) negative reaction to this by Black cultural nationalist authors such as C. O. Simpkins, is the assumption that the tools of biography are inherently Eurocentric. Inserting political relevance and meaning into the narrative, omitting proper source information and references, biographical work in jazz was, it was claimed, characteristic of journalistic practice rather than academic research (2007:126-127). Lewis Porter's landmark essay "Some Problems in Jazz Research" addresses the lack of rigorous research in jazz biographies (1988:196). His four points of emphasis for researchers, and which remain relevant, are as follows: A respectful attitude towards the subject, viewing jazz as much as possible from a Black perspective and taking seriously the study of Black musicians, a wide variety of cross-referenced resources, and finally (even if it seems an obvious point) knowing as much as possible about the subject before writing (1988:203). Porter and other jazz musicologists developed a detailed approach that engaged with the social, political and racial aspects of jazz, known as offering Afro-modernist or Afrological

perspectives (Perchard, 2007:278). Porter's points are particularly important to act on: I must be rigorous in my method, respectful towards the musicians and conscious of the origins of the music I am studying. The social contexts in which the South African bassists existed is also vital to establish, and details about racial dynamics and the difficulties Black musics and musicians experienced can't be brushed over. As I wrote in the Introduction, I am a white bassist-researcher and only moved to South Africa at the age of 10, so I feel these 'lessons' acutely.

South African jazz studies have directly benefited from and been informed by the academic developments discussed above. The definition of jazz is a hotly contested topic (Pinheiro, 2022:272-274) and the process of its dissemination to the rest of the world, including South Africa, was poorly represented in academia until relatively recently; South African jazz studies gained traction since roughly the 1990s. Biographies in South African jazz studies have also been relatively underrepresented within the field (Ramanna, 2016:8). The global spread and local adoption of jazz was described by Stuart Nicholson as a process of 'glocalization' (2022:279). South African jazz sits in a unique position likely being one of the earliest instances of the glocalization of jazz. The influence of American jazz in pre-apartheid colonial South Africa led to the creation of swing bands all over the country in the 1920s. Local jazz-influenced genres such as *marabi* and big band *mbaqanga* developed, and comparison to an American counterpart was the ultimate seal of approval (Ballantine, 1991:124-125). This tradition of comparison to American jazz continued into the 1950s and 60s, for example Kippie Moeketsi has been claimed as the South African Charlie Parker, Winston Mankunku the local John Coltrane.

David Coplan (1985, 2007) and Christopher Ballantine (1993), and a few other scholars, set the tone for South African jazz scholarship in the late twentieth century that included a lot of biographical information in their wide-spanning works. More focused accounts have appeared in recent years. Three recent theses are good examples of the place of biography in South African jazz studies. Nduduzo Makhatini's master's thesis biography on Bheki Mseleku is a good reference, because Mseleku was a colleague of several musicians I am studying, giving context for the social conditions in which they worked and their musical development (2018). Sello Galane's doctoral research includes a biography on Philip Tabane (2009: ch. 3) and is more in-depth than the short biographies I present but it raises the important point that South African jazz has worked to obscure indigenous musics. Tabane

created the genre *malambo* to reclaim his music from jazz's 'neo-colonial' definitions (2009:7).

Asher Gamedze's master's thesis while not a biography takes a cosmological and 'Cabralian' (from the political theorist Amilcar Cabral) philosophical approach to the subject claiming South African jazz as a liberating, resistance and spiritual practice citing the work and thought of Zim Ngqawana, Nduduzo Makhathini, The Blue Notes and Philip Tabane as examples. He characterises *malambo* for example as "a synthesis between an African-rooted spiritual practice that exists beyond contemporary borders, and jazz – a global, predominantly urban-based, black art form", arguing that Tabane's artistic journey was a moving away from jazz and towards traditional musics (specifically *Venda* and *Ndebele*) (2018:27-28). The artistic and personal processes of rejection of a neo-colonial mindset is an important context for some of the mini-biographies I present.

A selection of other South African scholarship on jazz that presents or considers biography includes Mojapelo and Galane's *Beyond Memory* which contains many short biographies but is written from an individuals' (Mojapelo's) direct experience, perspective and account of events (2008). Lindelwa Dalamba takes a historically grounded approach to her biography of Gwigwi Mrwebi with analysis and discussions of the social context and implications of his musical representation and direction (2016).

Phuti Sepuru's (2019) and Shaun Johannes's (2010) respective PhD and master's theses are more comparable in terms of structure and content to my work. They use biography to critically engage with musical genres and styles. This is evident for example in chapter four of Sepuru's thesis in which she discusses the development of a musical identity and personal style (2019: 60-101) as well as analyses the overall features of the South African jazz piano idiom (2019:101-125). Johannes uses *ghoema* as a reference point for his bassists establishing their connections with the genre and defining their place in it (2010). This is what I hope to do with the biographies of the bassists I present: to create context in order to explain the musical landscape and development of the instrument in the hands of the bassists who are the focus of this study.

The biographical information I present in this chapter takes an oral history approach and is based on extended interviews I did with the bassists and their collaborators. One example of the use of jazz-focussed oral history in South Africa is *Unsung* edited by Chatradari Devroop and Chirs Walton (2007) which documents unedited interviews conducted with jazz

musicians to gain insight into their perspectives and stories without the filter of academic analysis.⁵ *Unsung* focussed on musicians from oppressed and marginalised groups that would have otherwise been under-represented in the collective bibliography on South African jazz (Devroop and Walton, 2007:3-9). The collection includes nuggets of history that might have gone unrecorded. Jazz studies grew and developed alongside oral history, such that the latter is an important part of the development of jazz research (Peretti, 2001:582). In the biographies I present, I employ the tools developed by oral history to interpret my interviews through their respective narratives; so I do not present unfiltered transcripts of interviews as appear in *Unsung*. Interpretation as Burton Peretti puts it is the final frontier of oral history (2001:593).

Comparable academic studies to *Unsung* are oral histories recorded by scholars of jazz in North America. The 1960s and 1970s saw historians celebrating the unedited raw stories provided, initially wanting musicians to tell their own stories. Since then, more rigorous methods for interviewing and analysis have developed (Peretti, 2001:586). Peretti asserts that jazz oral histories “are documents whose complexities are internal as well as contextual” (2001:593). Here contextual means that the information collected through interviews is placed within the broader social and musical contexts of the time; whereas internal complexities include matters as seemingly trivial as acknowledging that audio or video recordings of interviews contain gestures and inflections that should be interpreted as well.

To an extent an interview is a performance, a well-orchestrated account of frequently told stories and should be interpreted as such (2001:595). “A life story can be considered as a kind of narrative idea about the self and the identity” (Smilde, 2011:85). Rineke Smilde calls this narrative research, which analyses the building blocks and social contexts musicians use to construct their story/identity (2011:99). Dalamba in her master’s thesis discusses the different narratives that construct South African jazz (auto)biography, particularly those by/of Hugh Masekela, Miriam Makeba and Joe Mogosti. This is more complex than a ‘straight’ oral history account as one must consider, for instance, the national narrative, (ghost) writers’ narratives, the narrative of exile and the musicians’ individual stories (2006:1-21). Acknowledging the different narratives that inform biography is informative as it applies the idea of narrative research to specific South African complexities.

⁵ Another example of oral history in South African jazz studies is *The Story of South African Jazz Vol.1* and *Vol.2* by Struan Douglas, but as Lindelwa Dalamba points out in her article, there are too many historical inaccuracies in Douglas’s account for it to be considered an always reliable primary source (Dalamba, 2021).

A particular focus of my brief biographies is the musicians' learning, and so I draw on theory of the learning biography. Lifelong learning characterises much of my discussion with the bassists: how did they develop as bass players and musicians, how did their musicking react to developing external circumstances, and how did they adapt their careers and musicking? Musical learning takes place on a continuum, much of it informal or non-formal. The motivation for musicians to learn is interwoven with musical and non-musical factors, but fundamentally requires an intrinsic creative drive that is described as a 'rage to master' (Smilde, 2011:50).

Jazz musicians often begin their learning by copying their idols, acquiring vocabulary by imitation, at the same time developing valuable aural training (Smilde, 2011:85). A particularly applicable concept is 'significant learning', which includes mentoring by the musicians' significant musical others in learning and various forms of leadership, i.e. artistic, generic and educational (Smilde, 2011:138). Significant learning is learning that changes someone's (musical) behaviour or self (2011:86). A closely related concept to this is 'transformative learning' which involves the critical reflection that enables new understandings. Significant others in learning are key figures in the musicians' lives, and can be fellow musicians, teachers, or students (Smilde, 2011:129).

I tend to view the group of bassists I am researching as participating in something of a musical movement towards the popularisation of the electric bass in South African music. They were all influenced by each other and developed ideas, techniques and the idiom as a disparate group (although always with connections beyond the group). I cover this in the final section of the chapter but say here that in many ways this section aims to be a biography not of each individual but a window into South African bass music and its development of this relatively new instrument. The biographies themselves are focused on the musicians' early musical career and an important time in the development of the instrument in the country between 1970 and 1994. Information outside of that is important context but not given detailed discussion.

Sipho Gumede

Sipho Gumede (1952-2004) was a fiercely original and exceptionally talented musician, often refusing to play bass lines written for him and rather composing his own (Mahlangu

interview, 2024).⁶ With his six-string bass he forged a leading role for himself redefining what a bassist could do within the South African idiom. He was a staunchly African (Zulu) man (Ledwaba, 2020) and a trailblazer for many others that followed him (Mahlangu interview, 2024:30), and was one of the first to bring the six-string bass to prominence in South Africa, even playing the rare eight-string bass for a time during the 1980s (Mojapelo, 2008:91).

Born in Cato Manor, Durban on 17 April 1952 (Sipho Gumede, 2023), Gumede started playing homemade guitars and pennywhistle at an early age. In KwaZulu-Natal, the guitar stylings of *maskanda*, *mbube* and *kwela*⁷ music would have played a part in his early musical influences.⁸ His introduction to jazz guitar came from Cyril Magubane (a local significant other in learning (Smilde, 2010: 86)), with Wes Montgomery a key musical influence. Shortly after meeting Magubane, Gumede picked up the bass when he was sixteen. Gumede would lift Magubane around in his wheelchair, playing at the local YMCA and in various bands (Mahlangu interview, 2024:30), eventually getting his first professional gig with the Jazz Revellers.

Durban was likely too small to fit Gumede's ambitions, and so he moved to Soweto at the age of eighteen where he quickly gained traction among a growing contingent of musicians in the area. Dorkay House in Eloff Street, Johannesburg, the home of Union Artists (Coplan, 2007:213, 233), was the hub in which he met and worked with Dennis Mpale, Cocky Tlhotlhemaje and Dick Khoza; quickly booking his first tour with the playwright and composer Gibson Kente (Sipho Gumede, 2023). In 1975 he began recording with Abdullah Ibrahim a relationship that lasted for many years. The turning point in his career though came when he joined The Roots playing with Duke Makasi and Barney Rachabane. Gumede, Makasi and Bheki Mseleku went on to form the jazz fusion band Spirits Rejoice, recording albums such as *Joy* and *Spirits Rejoice!* in 1977 and 1978 respectively, in which he displayed his bass playing prowess ("Sipho Gumede Discography").

It was around 1975 while he was playing with Sipho 'Hotstix' Mabuse in a band called the Beaters (later Harari) that he met a saxophone player called Khaya Mahlangu. This band was

⁶ Khaya Mhahlangu is my main interviewee for information on Gumede, since he was an early and frequent collaborator with Gumede and also played with most of my other subjects.

⁷ See Glossary for genre definitions.

⁸ *Maskanda* and the development of guitar music in KwaZulu-Natal is notable cultural feature of the region. Billy Monama explores the genre in depth in his book *Introduction to South African Guitar Styles: Five Decades of Ukuvamba* (2020).

one of the originators of the genre Soweto soul, which was later known as township soul (Mojapelo, 2008:1). Of his first impressions Mahlangu said this of Gumede: “At the time there was no electric bass player that played like him. So, he influenced a whole generation of bass players. He kind of pioneered and paved the way. Because as a backing instrument, he transcended that barrier” (Mahlangu interview, 2024:30). The two developed a friendship and started talking about starting a band. After Mahlangu had been a member of the Pelican House band for four years and was directly inspired by Makasi, Mahlangu was enlisted into both Harari and Spirits Rejoice. They both soon left Spirits Rejoice with Gumede being replaced by a young Spencer Mbadu (Mahlangu interview, 2024:28-29).

Gumede and Mahlangu combined their substantial abilities to explore a new musical direction, one that had a strong South African identity and was for the people (Mahlangu interview, 2024:33). In 1981 the band Sakhile was born out of these discussions. It was “a different, more jazz-based Afro-funk fusion ensemble, [and] involved some of the most creative and technically professional younger township musicians of the early 1980s” (Coplan, 2007:304-305). Initially consisting of Gabriel Segwagwa Thobejane (percussion), Menyatso Mathole (guitar), Madoda Mathunjwa (drums) and Don Laka (keyboards) (Mojapelo, 2008:209) the band spent time in Durban for three months writing music for their self-titled album (Mahlangu interview, 2024:34). Released in 1983 the album received a lot of attention and quickly became their golden goose as Mahlangu puts it (Mahlangu interview, 2024:36). Gumede wrote or co-wrote the majority of the music; he had, Mahlangu recalled, a highly developed harmonic sense (Mahlangu interview, 2024:33). The music was written to be empowering to South Africans:

Apartheid was designed to make you feel inferior. To make you feel inadequate and stuff. So, we were rebelling against those things. People would come to the concert, like I really feel proud that I am South African (Mahlangu interview, 2024:34-35).

The process of this musical change was informed to some extent by the Pan-African and Black Consciousness movements; Black artists and audiences became more aware and proud of their culture (Gamedze, 2018:88) and Mahlangu describes wanting to take a more Afrocentric approach. They felt that holding themselves respectfully and accountable (for example, not being drunk during performances) to their art and audiences was an important distinction between them and the previous generation (Mahlangu interview, 2024:34-35).

According to Mahlangu, Gumede practiced a lot early on but by this stage of his career, in the 1970s, did not practice scales or lines but would rather compose and further explore his musical ideas. His technique developed from the wealth of gigging and recording experience and in order to develop his musical vision further, he focussed on composition when he was with his instrument (Mahlangu interview, 2024:30). In the song ‘Mantombi’ from *Sakhile*, in which Gumede plays the melody with a phaser effect on the bass, he displays his unique approach and is a precursor of sorts to his solo career (Sipho Gumede Discography”).

Although Gumede often played melodic lines and content before this I would identify this song as a transformative or significant learning experience (a pivotal moment) (Smilde, 2010:144), where he realised that his bass sound could be the focus of a musical arrangement.

After two years with Sakhile, Gumede was getting opportunities outside of the band, often leaving it to play other gigs, which led to the frustration of the other members. In 1984, in somewhat dramatic fashion, he left the band high and dry with upcoming gigs, and decided to embark on a solo career. This was what Smilde might call a “critical incident” (2010:85): Gumede likely realised his vision couldn’t be achieved in an ensemble of strong personalities, and after leaving the group there was a distinct shift in the musical character of his work.

After a short stint with Thembi Mtshali in a band he formed called Peace (Mojapelo, 2008:91), his second solo album *Faces and Places* was released in 1985, the same year as Sakhile’s album *New Life* with Fana Zulu on bass. Mahlangu also released his own album and was featured on Gumede’s album, but their relationship was strained by Gumede’s actions (Mahlangu interview, 2024:35-36). Gumede’s solo sound would become ‘lighter’ (and more pop orientated) than the fusion music of Sakhile.

He continued to develop this sound with seven releases between 1986 and 1996.⁹ In 1998 he realised what could be considered the culmination of his work, *Blues For My Mother*, a five-time SAMA nomination featuring the hit song “When Days are Dark, Friends are Few” (Mojapelo, 2008:212), which gained commercial success. Here he played the melody bass line and an almost two-minute solo all on his trademark six-string bass. I note that the general direction of Gumede’s career mirrors Bakithi Kumalo’s journey from jazz to fusion to more mainstream appeal (Kumalo interview, 2024).

⁹ Between 1981 and 1996 Gumede released: *Way Back Home* (1981), *Faces and Places* (1985), *We Know Who We Are* (1986), *Village Dance* (1988), *Thank You for Listening* (1990), *Banana City Jive* (1991), *Down Freedom Avenue* (1994) and *Ubuntu-Humanity* (1996) (Sipho Gumede Discography).

Sakhile reunited in 1987, after meeting at a party in New York, and recorded a few more albums, but was never quite the same according to Mahlangu. There was a lot of respect between them, but the interpersonal issues were too great, and they had grown apart musically so he left in 1992 before he could ‘flip’ as he put it (Mahlangu interview, 2024:36). Gumede continued to have an active career until his untimely passing in 2004 (Sipho Gumede, 2023).

Bakithi Kumalo

Perhaps South Africa’s best-known bass export was born Bakithi Khumalo in Soweto on the 10th of May in 1956 to a musical household. Kumalo later dropped the ‘h’ in his name (Kumalo interview, 2024:6). His introduction to live music was watching his uncle’s band playing on the weekends, listening to them perform swing music such as by Duke Ellington and Count Basie, and local genres like marabi and kwela (Kumalo interview, 2024:4). He began his informal learning by playing saxophone in imitation of his uncle. Somewhere between the ages of eight and ten he became more seriously interested in the music but was too physically small to play an upright bass yet. Within these fertile surroundings he had the space to explore musically at a young age playing drums, guitar and he also discovered the electric bass. Outside of the music of his uncle’s band he would hear the choral music in the community and see dancers on the streets of Soweto, describing with fondness the different cultures and languages being expressed.

It was a beautiful thing for me as a kid but, you know, the government was against it and they took that culture away, they would sell us western music and everybody just got caught up with this (Kumalo interview, 2024:5).

The embrace of local musics is an important part of Kumalo’s musical direction, and like Phillip Tabane his interest moved away from jazz and towards traditional musics (Galane, 2009:6-13). Starting at such a young age in a rich but informal learning environment enables musicians to develop a positive and creative association with music, also highlighting the necessity for a drive to seek out information. It also creates an early sense of the social value of music (Smilde, 2011:223-225).

Kumalo would go to TOMS music store in Johannesburg to practice because he didn’t have enough money to buy a bass; there was a fretless bass at the shop that no one wanted to buy

so they allowed him to practice on that. He would then go back to Soweto for rehearsal and play on a bass with uncomfortably high action. Eventually his mother gave him the money to buy the fretless bass at TOMS and he could finally practice at home (Kumalo interview, 2024:9). But it took some time to get his fretless playing up to scratch, getting kicked out of a number of bands in the months after receiving the bass (Kumalo interview, 2024:9).

He credits a later six-month trip to Lesotho playing with traditional musicians whose intonation was ‘out of tune’ (from standard western tuning) as the turning point for him as he was able to listen and adapt to them. In the early 1980s Sipho Gumede became close with Kumalo and gave him key advice: he told Kumalo to double down, play with his ears and practice the fretless (Kumalo interview, 2024:9-10). This newly found resolve and experience in Lesotho was a transformative learning experience that pushed Kumalo towards refining his technique and finding a musical direction (Smilde, 2011:85).

Around 1969, possibly the most important significant other in Kumalo’s musical life, Vusi Khumalo, moved to Soweto. Khumalo’s family had been forced out of their home in eastern township which he describes as a rich cultural environment filled with music, politics (the PAC and ANC) and other amenities (electricity, radios in every house, basketball courts, tennis courts). In eastern township he had been neighbours with the great Kippie Moeketsi and his father played baritone for Chris McGregor’s Blue Notes and in Gibson Kente’s plays (Khumalo interview 2024:39). A cruel twist of fate created by the apartheid machine displacing an entire community, led to the creation of one of the best and most prolific rhythm sections in South African music history. Growing up around these musicians and music Vusi Khumalo had a lot to offer Kumalo. When they first started playing together, they would transcribe music by ear, spending hours on the fusion music of the time such as Weather Report or Chick Corea. They would rehearse in the evenings, according to Fana Zulu five nights a week with or without gigs (Zulu interview, 2024:24). On his early development, Kumalo claims proudly: “I was ahead of everyone because for me, it was about really paying attention when I listened to the record” (Kumalo interview, 2024:8).

The two K(h)umalos began their recording career in the mid-1970s – Kumalo emphasised to me the importance of recording in his early music career. Having played on a wide variety of records early on, he was able to hear himself back and develop his style and what he heard and liked about his playing (Kumalo interview, 2024:8). You can hear this care for detail and

nuanced approach especially in his later recording of “Papa” by Sankomota (1989) which I consider in detail in the next chapter (Bakithi Kumalo Discography).

After some time in the studios, he began getting calls from the giants of local jazz in Kippie Moeketsi, Phillip Tabane, Barney Rachabane and Chris McGregor. “I was never scared to play with anyone because I wanted to learn” (Kumalo interview, 2024:6). He credits Allen Kwela as being hard on him early on and one of his many brilliant teachers.¹⁰ Playing with Moeketsi was less about performing and more about listening according to Kumalo (Kumalo interview, 2024:8). These mentoring musicians played a significant role in Kumalo’s technical development, musicality and artistic direction (which to some extent involved a rejection of the hierarchy, by which some of his mentors considered American musics as more advanced) (Smilde, 2011:92). During this time, he was ‘hitting the giants’ as he puts it and developing his musical identity and sound. After these experiences, the K(h)umalos formed their own band with friends called Thetha (Kumalo interview, 2024:6).

The band was instrumental in their development as it gave them a platform to explore their ideas. After a few records and some time with Thetha, Kumalo felt that he was growing in a different direction. He had also begun playing with Sakhile around that time (in the mid-1980s) and he found the music to be challenging and complicated. He respected Khaya Mahlangu but felt that “that stuff was good for Sipho [Gumede], because he had the energy to do that” (Kumalo interview, 2024:12). Overall Kumalo wanted to focus on his sound, informed by the traditional styles he loved and the recording experience he had had up to that point. He wanted his music to be understood and heard by a wide audience, not to show off his technical ability.

By this time (in 1985) the K(h)umalos were the first call session guys in Johannesburg, and they had been touring with a traditional Sotho music group when they were called in to Ovation Studios for what they thought was just another local artists session (Kumalo interview, 2024:9). “For us it was, one of the million white people we do sessions with” (Khumalo interview, 2024:46). Only when they went out to lunch later in the day and Paul Simon, for whom they were recording, talked about his regular drummer Steve Gadd and that he had written “Bridge over troubled water”, did they realise that the gig was something out of the ordinary (Khumalo interview, 2024:44).

¹⁰ Guitarist Allen Kwela (1939-2003) was, like the other legends listed here, an important influence on South African jazz.

During the session Kumalo asked, as a birthday present, to do a fill on “You Can Call Me Al”. The engineer then reversed the tape and created the iconic bass break that Kumalo relearned in reverse (SBL YouTube). They still had to finish the recording when heading off for some contracted gigs with Thetha and suggested Ray Phiri for guitar. After the *Graceland* sessions Vusi Khumalo went to Zambia with Sipho Gumede playing for the exiled ANC and life was seemingly back to normal (Khumalo interview, 2024:46). But everything would not be the same. Recalls Khumalo, “*Graceland* for me, it’s what really opened doors to say who Bakithi was. And showcase my bass playing” (Kumalo interview, 2024:3). *The Graceland* sessions have become the stuff of legend and the recording, controversial due to the cultural boycott and political ambiguity of the musicians involved, was a global hit (Meintjes, 1990:39). Louise Meintjes points to issues in the accreditation and apartheid government’s use of the album as evidence of their ‘reform’ agenda amongst other matters as evidence of non-collaboration and cultural appropriation (1990:57).

But for the musicians involved, Ladysmith Black Mambaso, Ray Phiri, Bakithi Kumalo and Vusi Khumalo, it opened up a new world. When the album was released in 1986, they went on tour with Simon. After the *Graceland* experience, Kumalo continued to work with Simon, splitting his time between America and Soweto (Bakithi Kumalo epk) and in the 1990s he did a long stint in Hugh Masekela’s band playing all over the world with the likes of Miriam Makeba (Kumalo interview, 2024:13). Kumalo relocated to America in 1988 (Bakithi Kumalo epk), conquering the musical world with his unique sound, and playing on countless records with the likes of Herbie Hancock, Randy Brecker, Cyndi Laupner, Grover Washington Jr, Harry Belafonte, Miriam Makeba, Letta Mbula, and many others (Bakithi Kumalo Discography). He was later voted one of the top 50 bass players in the world by *Bass Player* magazine (Bernstein, 2020) and his Washburn bass is in the Bass Hall of Fame (Kumalo interview, 2024:13).

Fana Zulu

One of Kumalo’s most fervent bass disciples, Fana Zulu, was born on the 24th of April 1961. A few years younger Zulu followed in the footsteps of Gumede and Kumalo. A humble man, he was often hesitant about opportunities but was consistently pursued by great musicians to join them. He would become one of the top session players in the country.

Zulu's first introduction to music was playing with street bands, on a one-string bass at around the age of seven. His father discouraged him from playing music, saying he would end up like all the other drunk and destitute musicians around the township (Zulu interview, 2024:16). This did not stop him from seeking music out. Luckily his neighbour was a sangoma and he was able to play drums (*izigubhu*) there (Zulu in Madope, 2019:3:00-4:10). This connection with groove and rhythm became a key feature of Zulu's musicality, leading to his great feel and famously solid bass playing. He then became a drum major at the age of ten.

Zulu would sit outside his neighbour's band and listen to them play, realising that if he got them cigarettes they would let him come inside and play their instruments while they smoked (Zulu interview, 2024:17). At 16 he was given a chance to perform by the guitarist in that band, and they would play the funk and disco music popular at the time, such that Carlos Santana and Earth Wind and Fire were early influences for Zulu. Eventually Jabu Khanyile asked him to join the Editions, starting his professional career in earnest (Zulu interview, 2024:17).

During this time, he was able to see the top bass players in action such as Bakithi Kumalo then performing with Thetha and Sipho Gumede in Sakhile, both having a key influence on his playing (Zulu interview, 2024). Around 1979 Kumalo introduced Zulu to Stanley Clarke and songs like 'Teen Town' (Jaco Pastorius, 1977). Nathan East was also an important influence on Zulu's playing (Zulu interview, 2024:22). Zulu began on a four-string instrument but moved to five strings early on, playing a Washburn bass as Kumalo did. As a result, the brand has left a unique mark on the South African bass sound; and Zulu's bass has been with him for over thirty years. He bought it as a replacement for another Washburn that had been stolen, and going to TOMS music store he asked for the cheapest five-string bass available (Zulu interview, 2024:23). He plays his bass upside down, left-handed but strung as a right-handed (a style made famous by Jimi Hendrix), which leads to the use of different fingering and a unique perspective in playing bass lines. The lower strings are easier to reach but creates certain difficulties when slapping or playing in the higher register (Zulu interview, 2024:21-22).

Zulu refers to Bakithi Kumalo as his hero, a respect that goes beyond Kumalo's introducing him to modern fusion players such as Stanley Clarke and Jaco Pastorius (Zulu interview, 2024:20). This relationship is both a significant other in learning and a mentoring musician to

use Smilde's designations (2011:92, 86). A few years later, when Zulu was twenty-three and on tour in Durban, Khaya Mahlangu approached him to replace Gumede in Sakhile. Zulu initially refused, remembering that he said: "Khaya, I won't be able to play that kind of music. He said, Fana it's not about that we will teach you, everything is possible" (Zulu interview, 2024:18). So Mahlangu did, taking Zulu through all the music theory and knowledge he would need to play in the band. He had a few days to learn the music and by the time the first rehearsal came round he had learnt all of the most difficult tunes (Zulu interview, 2024:18). This was his second most important mentorship, learning indirectly from Gumede and directly from Mahlangu, another significant other who offered him the educational, emotional and creative support he needed to develop his musicianship (Smilde, 2011:129).

Zulu played with Sakhile for a year, and on their album *New Life* (1983), but found Gumede's sound too dominant to replace (Zulu interview, 2024:19). But this opportunity opened new doors for Zulu and in 1984 Themba Mkhize asked him to join Bayete, also getting his old friend Jabu Khanyile to join. While on tour in Botswana Khanyile was playing drums in the band, they were playing fusion music and other covers but were asked by a promoter to add a vocalist, Zulu suggested that Khanyile do the job and after complaints from the audience not being able to see the singer they get a new drummer, thus the line up for Bayete that became well-known was born. Their song "Mbombela" was a big hit, and with it they moved away from fusion towards crafting their own sound (Zulu interview, 2024:19-20).

Coplan praises Bayete for their longevity and labels them "neo-traditional popular", being one of the most polished and successful exponents of using traditional instruments like the marimba (2007:304, 307). Martin points to their musical efforts rebirthing the stylistic elements of jive and kwela (2007:233) and Ansel highlights their use of progressive lyrics, noting that the band wove a fine line between urban pop, rural traditional and jazz music (2004:187).

In 1985 after receiving advice from Victor Ntoni a returning bass player who attended Berklee (in Boston) Zulu adjusted his playing technique such that his holding of the neck was lighter. Known as 'the claw' (one finger to a fret) he un-flattened his fingers and included the John Patitucci exercise 'the spider' in his practice regime (Zulu interview, 2024:22).

Up to this point Zulu had replaced one of his heroes (Gumede) in a band, but his most important influence Bakithi Kumalo had left a hole in the South African music scene by moving overseas. Vusi Khumalo was on the look out for a new bass player with whom to collaborate and actively pursued Zulu, asking him to join him every time they saw each other:

I said no the guy cannot have so many excuses. I went to his place when I caught him there, he couldn't, you know, he couldn't have any excuses - so he said to me, hey, you know what, you caught me this time. I said, you know, this time; you are going to learn everything. (Khumalo interview, 2024:47).

Zulu joined Khumalo's Project Dondo (Mojapelo, 2008:152). They had a run of gigs at Kippie's, and also began recording together. Around this time Zulu recorded with Philip Tabane on *Ke A Bereka* (Fana Zulu Discography). He continued playing with Bayete when around 1993 a young pianist from Hugh Masekela's band asked them to play for his debut album. Moses Taiwa Molelekwa recorded *Finding Ones's Self* (1994) with Zulu and Khumalo and despite Molelekwa being so young he pushed the veteran musicians in take after take. The end result is a cherished piece of South African jazz history (Zulu interview, 2024:20). In 1996 Jimmy Dlodlu began his recording career calling on Zulu to record with him for his following three albums.¹¹ This was another success for Zulu and led to his longest running and most prestigious job (Fana Zulu Discography): he followed in Kumalo's footsteps once again, joining Hugh Masekela's band in the late 1990s in which he played until Masekela's death in 2018 (Mahlangu interview, 2024:36).

Overall Zulu represents the archetype of a South African bass player, one who occupies the supporting role that the bass has conventionally taken in the band. Time and again the greatest South African jazz musicians of his time pushed him to fulfil his potential and develop his musicianship; and it is for this reason that Zulu stresses the importance of researching and studying the bass lineage of South African music (Zulu in Madope, 2019:41:00-42:00).

¹¹ Zulu played on Dlodlu's *Afrocentric* (2001) and *Corners of my Soul* (2005). He also worked with Sibongile Khumalo and Philip Tabane on their records between 1996 and 2000.

Spencer Mbadu

Another exponent of that lineage is Spencer Mbadu whose high energy style left an indelible mark on South African music. Although he doesn't have the same sized catalogue of recordings as my other subjects, he won the respect of all the bass players and musicians he encountered, and is considered a true musician's musician. "I loved his playing. He was, he was phenomenal. He was one of the best bass players of all time" (Kumalo interview, 2024:1). Combining advanced techniques with a quick musical mind led him to being touted by some of the most important jazz musicians of his day.

Born in 1955 in Kensington (then known as Mcheko block Windermere) in Cape Town, his family were forcibly removed to what is now west Gugulethu in 1958. Growing up in a musical family Mbadu's grandmother played the harp teaching him from an early age, his father played multiple instruments, and his mother was a music lover who collected many records. Marabi, mbaqanga, ghoema, jazz and rock and roll were the genres he grew up listening to. As a child Mbadu loved Elvis and the Beatles even referring to himself as the "Black Elvis" (Mbadu interview, 2020).

Mbadu's initial inclination towards rock is in some ways surprising as his career was jazz focused but in many other ways unsurprising as his sound was full of liveliness and drive. Johannes characterises Mbadu as one of the most influential ghoema and mbaqanga bass players of his generation (2010:40). The particular styles of music within the Cape derived in part from the Malay influence on local musics, two of which ghoema and sopvlies lend a distinct feeling and sound (in comparison to the other bassists featured in this thesis) to Mbadu's bass playing (Johannes, 2010:30-36).

Mbadu absorbed all of this musical information like a sponge, beginning to play from three years old and writing his first song a year later (Johannes 2010:40-42). This early foundation meant that Mbadu found little interest in school or other subjects – music was his life. His harmonic knowledge developed on piano, guitar and harp. His melodic abilities from penny whistle and later saxophone. Rhythm came from playing drums and his uncle's broomstick bass (Mbadu interview, 2020). Mbadu found his musical peers in the Dyers, the Schilders and the Ngcukanas. These families are musical stalwarts of the Cape Town scene. Joel Christopher 'Columbus' Ngcukana was the leader of the Merry Macs, and his sons Duke and Ezra became prominent musicians in their own right. Hilton and Richard Schilder, as well as

Errol and Alvin Dyers were on the brink of an important musical movement in which traditional ghoema was ‘modernised’ (Martin, 2013:245).

This Cape music scene was Mbadu’s musical school; jamming, playing gigs and finding his way through a turbulent but growing music scene. He began playing bass in 1971 having mostly played guitar up to that point. In those early years Joseph Makwela was Mbadu’s bass playing idol. Mbadu was playing with bands like The Rockets, Fever, McCoy and Work Force. Johnny Gertze, an upright bass player known for his lopsided groove and ‘drunken’ style of walking bass, mentored Mbadu during the 1970s, an influence that can be heard clearly in Mbadu’s walking bass and sense of groove. Skyf was the first band Mbadu recorded with, it was also how he first met Mankunku. “We didn’t really get along at first because he was not used to my style but as we were playing more and more then he sort of really got hooked” (Mbadu interview, 2020).

Up to that point Gertze and Mike Campbell had been handling bass duties for Mankunku in the 1970s, but in 1979 both were unavailable for a gig and Mbadu was called up. Mbadu remembered wryly: “I think I became the victim [laughs] to put it that way. Because after that he didn’t want me to leave his band” (Mbadu interview, 2020). Mbadu spent a few years playing for Mankunku in Siyabuya with Bheki Mseleku on piano, before moving to Johannesburg around 1980 to join Mseleku’s old band Spirits Rejoice, when he replaced Gumede. He spent four years in Johannesburg, meeting Mombelli, Khumalo, Zulu, and Gumede and had an impact on all of them. “He was an amazing bass player”, Mombelli recalls (Mombelli interview, 2024:58). After Mbadu moved back to Cape Town he was called on by Mankunku at the last minute to replace Campbell, thereby winning back his place in Mankunku and Mike Perry’s band. Mankunku referred to Mbadu at that time as a walking university (Perry interview, 2020).

Mbadu had performed with most of the best musicians in South Africa but hadn’t recorded with many. That changed in the 1990s. He recorded with Hotep Galeta in 1990 on *Heading Home*, and with Abdullah Ibrahim on *Mantra Mode* in 1991. Galeta was something of a successor to Ibrahim’s sound and style, and these two albums ratified Mbadu as a leading jazz bass player (Spencer Mbadu Discography). Ibrahim chose him to play the energised and inebriated walking bass lines that he had mastered under Gertze. *Mantra Mode* featured Robbie Jansen, Basil Coetzee and Mbadu’s old friend Errol Dyers. Later Dyers recorded a solo record in 1998 with Mbadu featuring on bass (Mbadu interview, 2020).

Mbadu also recorded with Mankunku and Perry in 1996, and was an important influence on their ability to get “Dudula” and “Mashihambe” sounding right (Perry interview, 2020). The best representation of Mbadu’s playing style, I feel, can be found on 1998’s *Molo Africa*. Mbadu told me that his work on *Molo Africa* was in many ways the beginning of his musical journey (Mbadu interview, 2020). He was able to stretch his creative legs and finally let out the various grooves and techniques he had been honing during his career. The song “Khanya” in particular shows the chordal, slap and rhythmic abilities he had accumulated. I will look at this song in my analysis chapter. Work on the album was a significant learning experience for Mbadu, such that he was able to apply his musicality and creativity to a larger extent than before; and be appreciated for it (Mbadu interview, 2020).

Mbadu stayed in Cape Town for the rest of his life performing around the city with The Cape Jazz Band and many others, eventually switching to fretless bass. He supplemented his income by teaching at the Jazz Workshop in the CBD.

Carlo Mombelli

Another unique creative force within South African music, Mombelli had an unusual journey into bass playing. His style and musical sensibility were born out of a strength of character and dedication to his craft. Enamoured by a trip to the ballet his first love was classical music; and, as he puts it, hearing that music was like a hammer that hit him over the head. Realising that creating music was what he wanted to do, he began asking his parents to give him piano lessons, to no avail. Eventually they relented and at ten he took a few lessons on piano (Mombelli interview, 2024:51).

He went to live with his father in order to flee an abusive stepfather. Mombelli’s father owned a restaurant in Bloemfontein, and one night was asked if the young Mombelli could join the Drakensberg Boys’ Choir School, the country’s premier boys choir. His father refused and instead began using the 12-year-old Mombelli as the opening act to entertain his customers. Mombelli sang pop songs, with Micheal Jackson’s “Ben” being a hit, with the main attractions being the erotic dancer Glenda Kemp – and a snake named Oupa. Mombelli failed school that year and decided to return to his mother (Mombelli interview, 2024:52).

After a difficult year in St Lucia (in KwaZulu-Natal) at 14 he landed back in Pretoria, where he was able to take music as a school subject at Pretoria Boys’ High School, keeping it a

secret from his parents for his first year. At this time he began listening to Pink Floyd, Bob Marley and Led Zeppelin. He would practise piano during break and began composing his own pieces, even performing his compositions for exams (Mombelli interview, 2024:53). No one taught him how to compose music. Rather he would find his way to the forests at the bottom of the school grounds, taking inspiration from nature:

When the wind blew, there were more leaves. But it never got louder. But it felt louder. So, I started learning all these kinds of things on my own, just by listening. I listened to looping - the sound of the insects - the birds started setting up loops. And I listened to the melodies. And I tried to write, compose music like that. (Mombelli interview, 2024:53).

Mombelli first heard Weather Report at 16. This was the second hammer hit. He saved up and bought first an acoustic guitar and then an Epiphone bass for R60 (Mombelli interview, 2024:54). The next recording that he recalls hearing that left an impact was Jaco Pastorius's self-titled first album (1976). This in turn led him to seek out the music of Pat Metheny, Joni Mitchell and perhaps his most significant influence music in the ECM Records catalogue. Jan Garbarek, Egberto Gismonti, Eberhart Weber and Ralph Towner were all intently listened to. This style of music suited Mombelli's classical sensibilities and resonates with him deeply to this day (Mombelli interview, 2024:56).

At 17 Mombelli ran away from home and, finding himself in need of money, he approached a local music store for a job. Still trying to finish school while supporting himself he eventually dropped out and pursued music full time (Mombelli interview, 2024:55). He would travel to Johannesburg to watch Johnny Fourie the jazz guitarist perform, tape the performance and go home to listen and learn the songs Fourie performed, mostly Chick Corea and other fusion music (Mombelli interview, 2024:55).¹² It was around this time, in 1977-1978, that Mombelli saw a band called Estudio with Robbie Jansen, Russel Herman, Tony Cedras, Louis Wald and Quadir Khan. They played intricate and experimental music (Devroop and Walton, 2007:49). This musical experience had a lasting impact on him; he heard music that he identified with being played and created locally (Mombelli pers. comm, 2 September 2024).

Mombelli began experimenting with fretless bass, even taking out half of the frets at one point, learning Pastorius's songs (Mombelli interview, 2024:55). His musical plans were cut short when he was called up to the army, and he joined the army band playing for the troops

¹² Johnny Fourie tells his own story from his young life, work overseas and his perspectives on jazz (see Devroop and Walton, 2007: 27-38).

on the border. But his style was not welcome; the army players didn't want to play with him labelling him a "pseudo-intellectual" bass player.

When he returned home he gigged with pianist Ricky Annandale, and was introduced to Miles Davis, jazz standards and walking bass. Annandale would write out bass lines for Mombelli to play (Mombelli interview, 2024:57). Johnny Fourie was a guest performer with Annandale and also appeared at the Castle Lager Battle of the Bands where Mombelli performed his original music. (It was at the Battle of the Bands that Mbadu and Mombelli met, beginning a long friendship.) Mombelli won most original musician at the competition. After this success Fourie approached him to join his band playing at the club Spats six nights a week. "I said to him, Johnny, I don't know if I'm good enough to play with you, because he was my like my idol, my guru." (Mombelli interview, 2024:58). A generation older than Mombelli, Fourie became his most important musical mentor, and the catalyst for much of his musical learning.

Mombelli then moved to Johannesburg, and on Sundays on his night off he would go to the jam sessions at Rumours with Duke Makasi hosted by Stan Jones (Mombelli interview, 2024:59). After six months of playing at Spats, he focussed on furthering his craft, listening to Bill Evans and Scott LaFaro in particular, and practising up to 12 hours a day. The result was hand surgery from overuse, and he was forced to practice with a cast on his right hand. He used this time to work on hammer ons and lift offs¹³ developing a more dynamic and emotive style; clear evidence of the 'rage to master' in self-learning (Smilde, 2009:50). The payoff was that Mombelli's own career was getting off the ground. He put his own band together with Fourie, occasionally including Makasi and Tony Moore called the Abstractions. Of their work together Fourie had this to say: "I played in Carlo's band...which was beautiful because it included Duke Makasi... I loved his music because it was so lyrical and modern... He was very, very sophisticated and had a very advanced harmonic feel" (Ansell, 2004:215). He then recorded his own album (*On The Other Side* (1988)), and a trio album with Fourie and a young Kevin Gibson (Mombelli interview, 2024:59).

In 1986 the police raided Mombelli's home, and found a copy of the Freedom Charter and pamphlets he and Sandra (his wife) had been handing out for the ECC¹⁴. They threatened to send Mombelli back to the army, which was the catalyst for his move overseas (Mombelli

¹³ See Glossary for definitions of hammer-ons and lift-offs.

¹⁴ The End Conscription Campaign (ECC) was an anti-apartheid group of conscientious objectors opposing conscription of white South Africans into the military.

interview, 2024:61). He settled on Munich, Germany because ECM was based there. Unable to get a meeting at ECM, he began teaching at the Munich Conservatory (Mombelli interview, 2024:62). Mombelli hit his stride in Europe, releasing *Abstractions* in 1989 with German saxophonist Jurgen Seefelder and *Happy Sad* in 1990 featuring Charlie Mariano and Mick Goodrick. Bill Elgart featured on all three of his European albums including *Dancing in a Museum* (1992) (Coweater, 2015). Mombelli joined a Brazilian band with Riaz de Pedra, an important musical influence and learning experience especially in terms of groove, and recorded with his hero Egberto Gismonti. Other highlights of this time include collaborating with Lee Konitz on a Zollsound recording and with Matthew Garrison on a recording dedicated to Jaco Pastorius called *Basstorious* (Mombelli interview, 2024:62, 64). Mombelli later switched to fretted bass, in part because of constant comparisons to Pastorius (Mombelli interview, 2024:65).

Mombelli returned to South African in 1998, leaving behind a thriving career in Europe. He relaunched his South African career playing with his band at the inaugural Cape Town Jazz Festival performing before Roy Hargrove and after Bheki Mseleku (Mombelli interview, 2024:63). The move away from Europe was the catalyst for an explosive run of albums and musical output (Mombelli interview, 2024:65). His list of collaborators since returning includes Miriam Makeba, Zim Ngqawana, Sibongile Khumalo, Sydney Mnisi, Khaya Mahlangu, Siya Makuzeni, Mbuso Khosa, Kesivan Naidoo, Kyle Shephard, Marcus Wyatt and many others (Carlo Mombelli Discography).

Mombelli's determination, dedication, passion and innate musicality led him to forge his own place within South African music. He continues to perform and compose music in Johannesburg, his latest album *Lullaby for Planet Earth* (2022) features Jorge Rossi and Wolfgang Muthspiel (Carlo Mombelli Discography). His book *Pulses in the Centre of Silence* (2019), a compilation of select compositions, has a detailed and inspiring description of his musical approach (Mombelli, 2019:4-34).¹⁵

¹⁵ Mombelli received his Doctorate from the University of Witwatersrand in 2009. He is currently the head of music at the University of Witwatersrand. His contributions and work within the educational sphere have inspired many and include his textbook *Mombelli's Intergalactic Bass Programme* (2019).

Instrument, Influences, Pathways and Identities

I end this chapter by attempting to give an overview, through the lenses of my subjects, of the period between roughly 1970 to 1994 of the development of the electric bass in South African jazz and popular music. I focus on four main topics I feel composers and bass players would be interested in. These are Instrument (why did they choose the electric bass, and what attributes make for a successful South African bass player?), Influences (what are the connecting and distinctive musical influences between the bass players featured in this research?), Pathways (what led these players to the careers they had and the musical directions they took?) and Identities (what are the musical and social influences that shaped their musicking?).

Instrument

It is noteworthy that none of the bass players in this study started playing music on bass, which Johannes notes is a common occurrence among the best bass players (2010:43). But, and interestingly, their first instruments are perhaps a good indication of a feature or features of their future performance style. Mombelli began singing and playing the piano, which is reflected in his chordal approach to the bass and the vocal qualities in his melodies and solos (Mombelli interview, 2024:52). Zulu started out on drums which reflects in his great sense of time and groove (Zulu interview, 2024:16). Gumede began on pennywhistle and guitar, and his playing style was innately melodic such that his bass often served as a lead instrument. His six-string playing in songs like ‘When Days are Dark Friends are Few’ (1997) and ‘Mantombi’ (1982) is sometimes closer to the role of a guitar than a bass (Mahlangu interview, 2024:29).

Similarly, Kumalo began on saxophone, before turning to guitar and drums. He used the fretless to create his melodic sounds, while just as original in style as Gumede outside of his solo work, Kumalo played less of a lead instrument role than Gumede. Mbadu came late to electric bass later (at 17 years old) first playing harp, guitar, piano, upright bass and saxophone. This is reflected in his deep understanding of harmony and technical facility. This is not to say that their mature bass style lacks anything as a result of their choice of and performance on the early instruments, but it does point to an enduring connection between their later playing styles and early influences.

What is perhaps more interesting is the range of conditions that led them to the bass as their instrument of professional practice and the variety of their career trajectories. The unfaltering ingredient to their musical ability and success was many years of practice and hard work. And all started performing and playing music at a young age. Gumede was a true pioneer of the instrument, and from the beginning of picking up the bass he seemed to have a vision of how he was going to approach it. Compositionally he was an innovator, from the Afro-fusion music he performed to mainstream appeal towards which he moved; and he was prolific in his output and musical quality. What exactly led Gumede to the electric bass remains unknown to me.

One can speculate that Cyril Magubane, an early collaborator (and himself a guitarist), had something to do with Gumede's move to bass (Mahlangu interview, 2024:29). It's often the case that people begin playing bass by default. Mbadu was booked for a gig without having played the instrument before (Mbadu interview, 2020). Unlike Gumede, Mbadu built his career on being of service to others; and as Mankunku put it, he was a walking university (Perry interview, 2020). In terms of technique, there was almost nothing he couldn't do but it was his creativity and musical knowledge for which he was valued as a bassist and musician.

Zulu's attraction to music was founded in defiance of his father's warning against the dangers of becoming a musician. He was attracted to the idea, image, and practice of musicians and bribed his way into the practice room of a local band (Zulu interview, 2024:16). This was an active seeking out of the instrument, and he drew on mentors and significant others in learning like the band mentioned above, and thereafter Jabu Khanyile, Bakhiti Kumalo and Khaya Mahlangu to learn the skills he needed as they became necessary. His ability to absorb information and adapt to different situations was key to his success. Kumalo's bass playing and career were built on quite the opposite: born into a musical family, one could say that music chose him. The fretless bass also 'chose him' as he bought the instrument after being forced to practice on it in TOM's music shop for want of other options. His agency was asserted by pioneering his sound in the mould of Sotho, Zulu and southern African music, and worked towards being booked for events that would allow him to play his style and express himself and his culture (Kumalo interview, 2024:9). He was also unafraid to work with a wide variety of artists both in his early career and later with Paul Simon, Herbie Hancock and Cindi Lauper, for example.

Similarly to Zulu, Mombelli was first discouraged from playing music, having to hide the fact that he took music as a subject in high school (Mombelli interview, 2024:53). Like Kumalo he ‘chased his sound’, and developed it with a European jazz (particularly ECM) sound in mind, seeking out mentors and influences that furthered this.

As with any musician there is, thus no one way to become and be a successful bass player but how one approaches one’s pathway to the instrument and the *métier* in general can certainly affect one’s style and the trajectory of one’s music career. As with the diversity of South Africa’s musical landscape itself the bassists here represent a wide palette of diverse influences: the wide variety of Zulu’s musicking contrasts with the particularity of Mombelli’s soundworld; local styles find home in international genres as with Kumalo whereas a strong sense of locally grounded music characterises Gumede’s work. The bassists in this study were chosen to represent as wide a variety of types of musicking, so perhaps it doesn’t surprise that their differences are more apparent than their similarities.

Influences

Similarities amongst the musicians largely comes in the shape of influential figures who guided and shaped their musical careers. Key figures who played with multiple bass players in this study are Abdullah Ibrahim, Khaya Mahlangu and Hugh Masekela. I characterise their influence and categorise their leadership roles in Smilde’s terms: artistic, generic and educational (2010:171-173). There are many connections between these players, so here I highlight the ones that were the most impactful in terms of their musical development and career.

Ibrahim can be thought of as an artistic leader, and is one of the elder statesmen of South African jazz (Smilde, 2010:171). He first worked with Gumede on the 1975 recording *African Herbs* (and on many subsequent recordings) and later worked with Mbadu on *Mantra Mode* (1991).¹⁶ His 1974 release of *Underground in Africa* was a pivotal move into jazz-rock fusion but *Mannenberg Is Where It’s Happening* released later in 1974 is credited for popularising elements of *marabi*, *langarm*, and *ghoema* into jazz fusion in South Africa. His use of the electric bass also set the precedent for others in South African jazz to follow

¹⁶ Gumede also worked with Ibrahim on: *Black lightning* (1976), *Sathima* (1988), *Voice of Africa* (1988), *Blue Monk* (1988) and *Ttinityana* (1988).

(Mason, 2007:34-35). For Ibrahim to give the nod to both of these bass players thereby helping to launch their recording careers shows his importance to their stories.

Hugh Masekela did not have the same kind of impact on Zulu and Kumalo. He was rather a point of ‘graduation’ for them. He took Kumalo around the world with Miriam Makeba and recording *Uptownship* (1989). This was fairly soon after Kumalo had finished the *Graceland* tour. Kumalo said it was a significant experience, while noting that Masekela was not the easiest to work with. He continued with Masekela until the late 1990s when Zulu took over. For Zulu, Masekela was his final and most important mentor, first recording with Masekela in 1999 on *Sixty* (Fana Zulu Discography). He played with him until the end of his life in 2018. Zulu’s solidity and wide range were a perfect complement to Masekela’s eclectic style. I would categorise Masekela as an artistic leader with generic leadership qualities: he always tried to push his music in new directions but didn’t necessarily, at this late stage of his career when Kumalo and Zulu worked with him, push his musicians to achieve their potential. Rather he required of them to fill a role to fit his musical vision.

While Masekela and Ibrahim were influential on these bassists and the genre, Khaya Mahlangu played with the widest group of the bassists under consideration. He performed with Mbadu at the Pelican between 1975 and 1979. After being friends with Gumede from 1977 he began playing with him in *Spirits Rejoice* in 1979. Mbadu then replaced Gumede in *Spirits Rejoice* soon after Mahlangu and Gumede founded Sakhile together. And after Gumede left Sakhile, Mahlangu recruited Zulu to replace him, becoming in turn a mentor to Zulu between 1984 and 1985.

Mahlangu worked with both Kumalo and Gumede for his first solo album *To You, My Dear* (1985), and for performances with Sakhile. Mahlangu is an important figure in the lineage of South African bass and a true educational leader, with Fana Zulu and others crediting him with raising their level of theoretical and practical musical knowledge (Smilde, 2010:172-173, Zulu interview, 2024:18-19). Mahlangu attended the University of Zululand from 1975 to 1978 being exposed there to critical thinking of the time, in particular the political and philosophical ideas of Black Consciousness that the South African Students Organisation were publicising before and after their ban and Biko’s murder in 1977 (Naidoo, 2015). This influenced Mahlangu’s broad and progressive view of musical education. His attitude towards information is not to gate-keep but rather to share what he knows. He is also a generic leader due to his organisational abilities and band leadership (Smilde, 2010:172).

Outside of direct mentorship, it is important to highlight the bass players of an earlier generation who set the standard of bass playing from which my subjects learnt. Of the many other bass players that emerged in my interviews as important influences, Joseph Makwela and Tony Sauli stood out. They were particularly influential local significant others in learning (Smilde 2010:12) for the bassists who are the subject of my research. Both were elder statesmen of the electric bass tradition in South Africa. Recalls Kumalo,

He was amazing, Tony Sauli. He played for (The) Drive with Nelson Magwaza, and that band was unbelievable, Tony Sauli was a solid bass player that I wanted to be like him (Kumalo interview, 2024:10).

The Drive was an early instrumental afro-funk, jazz, soul and fusion band. Sauli's playing and tone remind me most of Mbadu and Zulu: tight, always grooving, but not afraid to add his 'flavour'. In listening to their 1975 record *Unlimited*, particularly the song 'Spiritual Prayer' one can hear the facility and musicality of his playing. And given the time, the mid-1970s, one can hear the mbaqanga influence in their sound. The Drive was a musical precursor to bands like Spirits Rejoice, Sakhile, Bayete and Thetha. Members of The Drive including Sauli tragically passed away in a car crash in 1977.

Of Joseph Makwela, Mbadu said that he "was so rhythmical and so melodic on his bass... You would dance to his bass lines even if there was no drum beats going... He was really hip (Mbadu in Johannes, 2010:44). Makwela was also an important influence on Kumalo as a mentor, and they would often speak when recording at Gallo. Kumalo absorbed his advice and guidance (Kumalo interview, 2024:11). Makwela's mbaqanga bass lines set the tone (literally and figuratively) for the electric bass in South African music. "The *mbaqanga* tradition is based on locking into the groove using repetition and short melodic phrases" (Thorpe, 2018:51). He defined the above definition for the generation of players in this study. I explore in greater details aspects of his performance and music in the following chapter. Makwela passed away recently (in 2023) at the age of 83.

Pathways

The development of what might be thought as the Sowetan school of bass was characterised by amongst other things the reinvention of mbaqanga fundamentals in the context of contemporary music-making. The musicians who worked in this 'school' all influenced each other directly and indirectly throughout their careers. Even though he was born and raised in

Durban, Gumede seems to have been an elder or artistic leader in this group (Smilde, 2010:172). He was the first to take the sound into jazz and fusion and challenged its technical boundaries, enabling a more melodic approach that took the bass away from playing a purely supportive role (Mahlangu interview, 2024:29). Kumalo is another artistic leader; his key interactions with Gumede and Gumede's command of the six-string fretted bass is what led him to pursue the fretless bass with such dedication (Kumalo interview, 2024:10). Zulu was influenced by Kumalo the most, both directly as a mentor and indirectly by opportunities created by him. Gumede may not have mentored Zulu in the same way but the musical approach and knowledge he developed came to Zulu indirectly through Khaya Mahlangu (Zulu interview, 2024:19).

Spencer Mbadu is something of what one could call an honorary member of the Sowetan school. He developed by listening to and learning from Gertze, Kriel, Campbell, Mac Mackenzie and other Cape Town-based bass players. However, during his time in Johannesburg, he was a key influence on Kumalo and Zulu. Some practitioners and scholars, such as Denise Constant-Martin, advocate that 'Cape jazz' is a distinct genre within the South African jazz tradition (2007). The strong influence of Malay culture, *bossa nova* and *ghoema* should be taken into account when considering Mbadu's musical pathways; and Johannes' "Bassists of iKapa" thus identifies him as a leading figure for the Cape's unique style of bass playing (2010).

Living in Pretoria for a long time, and coming from a largely segregated white musical community, Mombelli developed separately. This is reflected in his musical direction and style. He was aware and influenced by other South African bass players of the time but had other seminal influences. So that while Duke Makasi and Khaya Mahlangu are the lynchpins of his connection to Gumede, Zulu and Kumalo, he was more interested in classical music, European jazz and modern fusion than traditional American jazz (Mombelli interview, 2024:51-54). But he credits his adaptability to Brazilian music to growing up around South African groove and polyrhythm (Mombelli interview, 2024:68). When asked about what young South African bassists should focus on in their learning Mombelli, Zulu and Kumalo all stressed the importance of learning and researching South African musics (Mombelli, pers. comm; Zulu in Madope, 2019:41:00-42:00; Kumalo interview, 2024). This shows the distinctive value and identity of South African jazz and popular musics and, especially for the

local bass lineage, its often unreported knowledge outside the practices and memories of bassists and other musicians.

Identities

What informed the musical and social movements of the time in which the bassists I study worked is also important to consider. The 1960s and 1970s were a period of cultural and musical change, with the immediate post-Sharpeville 1960s being a relatively quiet period politically (Gerhardt, 1978:257). In the 1970s Black Consciousness ignited a new generation of student activists and protest (257-264). The turbulent social conditions in the country left a mark on these musicians and their identities. The musical developments both technological (synthesisers, electric bass, amplification, and overdubbing) and stylistic (from genres such as funk, rock, soul, disco and fusion) had varied impacts on the musical identities of my subjects.

Coplan points to aesthetic tensions that developed around the time of the Soweto uprising (1976), which manifested in taste differences between urban and rural populations. One result was the decreased public performance of mbaqanga and increased interest in more ‘modern’ genres (like Afro-fusion) (2001:110). The early influence of rock on the musicians I spoke to created a preference towards a more driving sound. In their early musical lives, for example, Zulu listened to Carlos Santana and Deep Purple (Zulu interview, 2024:21), Mbadu loved Elvis (Mbadu interview, 2020), and Mombelli was influenced by Pink Floyd (Mombelli interview, 2024:53).

In terms of Afro-fusion musics (Thetha, Sakhile and Bayete) this generation of (baby boomer) artists worked to throw off comparisons to American jazz and popular musics, asserting that their music was not derivative of but influenced by American music. Kumalo aptly summarised their musical mindsets:

Listen, we did what we had to do with the Western support because Westerners, they will send us these songs that was not African music. So, for us, you know, to learn jazz, you know, I don't think, you know, we were, we were sold to jazz. And for me, I was against that.
(Kumalo interview, 2024:2).

Interestingly Mbadu did not like to think in terms of American and African musics (Johannes, 2010:81-82) which is reflected in his adaptation of Pastorius's and Makwela's influence in

equal measure (Johannes, 2010:68), even as he was a bastion of information on Cape styles and South African traditions (Perry interview, 2020; Johannes, 2010:40). It was an artistic standpoint, to not to make one music more important than the other; and is a different interpretation of Mahlangu's belief in the application of 'self-assertion'.

Mahlangu spoke about how musical identities could dovetail with the political:

Because it wasn't just about the music as well. It was about projecting the African image in a very positive light. We don't have to get permission from nobody to be who and what we are. Hence, one of our songs was like, we know who we are. Self-assertion. Because remember, at the time, apartheid was designed to make you feel inferior. To make you feel inadequate and stuff. So, we were rebelling against those things (Mahlangu interview, 2024:34).

During a time of vicious cultural erasure and division, these musicians sought to sustain and develop local musics with some (such as Mahlangu, Gumede Kumalo) also taking a pan-Africanist approach to their music (Mahlangu interview, 2024; Kumalo interview, 2024). It would, however, be naïve to assume that their interest in Afro-fusion and fusion musics was not also economically motivated. Mahlangu joked to the ethnomusicologist David Coplan: "What's the difference between a jazz musician and a pizza? A pizza can feed a family" (Coplan, 2007:344). The success of Masekela's Afro-funk and the relative success of Afro-fusion led musicians who might otherwise have focussed solely on jazz or South African jazz to 'compromise' (2007:344); that is, to make more accessible music for financial gain. While I think this is true for some musicians, the bassists I spoke to believe in the artistic value of their more mainstream music and its messages. Winston Mankunku was once asked by Salim Washington why he played fusion in his later career and not free jazz.

Mankunku avers that he loves the avant-garde saxophonists such as Oliver Lake and Albert Ayler, "but I could never work here playing like that." When pushed to explain why, he offered that people wanted to take it easy (Washington, 2013:100-101).

The demands of local audiences and the mood of the country, especially when times were tough for Black musicians during the height of apartheid, necessitate that it is also the artist's societal role to provide comfort and cheer.

On the whole, the bassists and musicians I spoke to felt that the 1970s and 1980s were a period of growth and relative prosperity for musicians (Zulu interview; Mahlangu interview; Kumalo interview). This was surprising to me as it was during the height of apartheid and rife

with racial oppression which directly affected jazz musicians and their work (see Duby, 2013; Coplan, 2007:259-261; and Mankunku in Allen, 2004:149). There seem to have been more live music venues and performances than in more recent times, and there are several possible reasons for this: the lack of international acts (due to the international cultural boycott of apartheid South Africa) resulted in larger fees for musicians at local festivals and concert performances (Mahlangu interview, 2024:37; also Coplan, 2007:259); there was a constant stream of work at the SABC which included re-recording international music; there was a heightened international interest in South African music due to the struggle (Coplan, 2007:344); and of course there is the potential for nostalgia in my interviewees, for remembering early phases of their careers through rose-tinted glasses. Whatever the case and reasons, these were formative decades in the lives and careers of the musicians who are the focus of my research – and a significant moment for the bass instrument in the history of South African jazz and popular music.

Chapter 2: The Bass in Time with Space

This chapter constitutes the musical substance of the thesis. Drawing on the scholarly literature, my interviews with the bassists, and my own experience as a bass player, I analyse transcriptions I made of select work by these bass players. Establishing the context of their practice, I endeavour to give an account of the development of their individual styles and musicality through the 1970s and into the early 1990s. It is important to remember this was the first generation of musicians who grew up listening to such a wide array of musics, from rock, funk, fusion, disco, jazz, *mbaqanga*, *ghoema*, *Maskanda*, *kwela*, and *marabi* to traditional musics (Mahlangu interview, 2024:33).

It was difficult under apartheid for Black musicians especially to get the kinds of formal training and professional exposure they needed to play the jazz and fusion that was developing globally in the 1970s (Devroop and Walton, 2007:49). However I show that not only did these bass players achieve the required technical ability but most importantly they created their own South African, Afro-fusion, Afro-pop and neo-traditional styles with these influences and new technologies (Kumalo interview, 2024:1; Mahlangu interview, 2024:33). This was achieved through intensely hard work and true ingenuity (Khumalo interview, 2024:42-43).

Methods

A few key sources inform the methodology for the analysis and transcriptions that are presented in this chapter (and in Appendix 2). Carlo Mombelli's *Pulses in the Centre of Silence* (2019) serves as a model to guide the structure, aesthetics and layout of my transcriptions. Having Mombelli as a supervisor of this research gave me insight into his own practice, and the clear and detailed bass charts he produces, and his personal ideas on the music's workings. Shaun Johannes's "Bassists of Ikapa" interprets South African bass playing to the page with attention to the nuances of the performance and with a comprehensive analysis of the *ghoema* bass lines of Spencer Mbadu and Gary Kriel informed by his own experience as a practising bassist and the biographical information he collected through interviews (2010:ch. 5). It is thus close to my own work in subject and method. These two sources form the basis of my transcription method and provide models for some of my analytical work.

Another helpful source is Robert Sabine's doctoral writing on Gary Peacock's work with Albert Ayler and others. It is another informative model of transcription using Todd Colman's model for bass transcription with a more detailed approach to analysis (2015).

In addition to these bass-specific sources on transcription, David Cousins' master's thesis on Bheki Mseleku is informative and detailed in terms of the history and theory of transcription more generally (2021:12-20). The motivation of my transcriptions, and their function, is not to record a musical event but rather to provide a visual aid to study and learn the music (2021:18). They are not lead sheets (which have a practical function of interpreting the whole work, reducing it into a page or two) as I chose to prioritise, and produce, a detailed visual aid as a first step towards analytical work (2021:17). Andrew Lilley's recent compendious account of Mseleku's compositional and improvisational style offers further useful analytical tools but Cousins' and Johannes' studies are more similar in content and scope to the work I undertake in this thesis (2020).

Ethnomusicology, which like jazz studies has a long history of employing transcription, offers a different take on the motivation behind transcription. Jason Stanyek understands transcription as a devoted labour, and a complex allegory representing more than just notes in time. What I take from this is a sense of responsibility to represent as accurately as possible the performer and cultures one presents in a transcription (Stanyek, 2014:108).

It is a truism that all notated music, including transcription, has built-in limitations, especially where rhythm and groove (so fundamental to bassing) can be expressed, but a careful and detailed approach can hopefully mitigate some of these limitations (Cousins, 2021:17). Written transcription, one could argue, should be understood as an extension of the oral tradition. "For many musicians and critics in jazz studies, oral tradition is a defining element of jazz" (Prouty, 2006:318). I have transcribed and studied the bass lines that appear in this chapter using first my own ears – and, importantly, my hands and body on the instrument – ensuring I could competently perform each line before committing it to the page.

So, if transcription is primarily a visual learning aid, then what functions and aims constitute music analysis? South African jazz scholarship that has influenced the structure and content of my analytical method includes Phuti Sepuru's doctoral thesis "Exploring Elements of Musical Style in South African Jazz Piano" (2019) and Nduduzo Makhathini's master's thesis "Encountering Bheki Mseleku: A Biographical-Analytical Consideration of his Life

and Music” (2018). These more recent studies (including Cousins (2021) focus on the combination of biographical information and practical style and performance analysis to create a clear picture of the work of individual musicians. As my focus revolves around the styles and musical roles of the bass players I study, I consider relevant scholarship and models that have informed my method.

For complex harmonic and chordal analysis, I draw on Mark Levine’s *The Jazz Theory Book* (1995), a long-time standard text on jazz theory that gives insight into the harmonic structures and thinking that were key developmental influences on the bassists who are the subject of this research. But it is limited in its scope as it is focused on American jazz. In order to gain insight into South African jazz melodic content I was influenced by Kevin Davidson’s analysis of the work of Barney Rachabane (2010). His paper offers a detailed explanation of what he calls “African bebop” and its effectiveness in emotive improvisation. Cousins suggests using the influences of an artist to target where certain features of a musician’s idiolect came from. He notes that comparison is “a valuable analytical tool, whether it be comparing the music under examination to general stylistic conventions or one particular artist” (2021:39).

For information on South African groove as well as some harmonic information, Christian Thorpe’s master’s thesis on ‘South African feel’ in jazz is invaluable and frequently referenced. He categorises and explores the wide varieties of South African groove, as well as the role of each instrument in producing it (2018). This in combination with Johannes’s work (2010) gives a solid basis to analyse South African groove. A general source on groove is Mark Abel’s *Groove: An Aesthetic of Measured Time* which documents the development of thinking around groove and how it functions within music. Abel establishes the four elements of groove: metronomic timing, syncopation, deep musicality or multi-levelled meter, and backbeat (2014).

Where Abel gives a good overview a more practical and relevant study is Daniel de Wet’s master’s thesis on Malcolm Braff’s rhythmic theories. Braff’s ideas revolve around macro- and micro-beats which I found useful in analysing bass lines (2017). Braff’s theories get into the nuts and bolts of how a groove functions. Where discussions on groove are often couched in ‘mystery’ and disagreement Braff clearly lays out comprehensive solutions for the discussion of groove. In addition to the above sources Mark Doffman’s master’s thesis on

three jazz trios analyses the differences in tempo between instruments as well as throughout a song, providing insight into the timing and role of the bass within an ensemble (2008).

Joseph Makwela: Towards Electrification



The speed of Makwela's single notes (attained by using double picking)¹⁷ is one factor, but I would argue that his tone and use of transients in the bass was the more important development. Makwela's tone is, more than 50 years later, unique and in terms of (new)

mbaqanga bass in my opinion unmatched. To create such a ‘big’ sound with a small line up and brushed drums shows the effectiveness of his tone. The combination of the high transient of pick playing and natural compression of tube amplification and balance of these by boosting his bass frequencies are the technical components that make up the basis of this tone. But as important in creating tone is the player’s sensitivity and technique on the instrument.



Example 2. Makwela’s bass on “*Emanzankeni*” by Makhona Zonke Band (1975) bars 1-6. My transcription.

Features of Makwela’s style are on display in his work with the Makhona Zonke Band, an instrumental group which functioned as the band for Mahlaithini, and is sometimes compared to Motown’s Funk Brothers (Makhona Zonke Band Discography). There is something to be said about a comparison between the legendary Motown bass player James Jameson and Makwela in terms of impact on their respective genres. Both lay the groundwork for the next generation of bass players. In Example 2 we see an early instance of the electric bass taking a leading role, and using his picking technique Makwela establishes a fast and driving melodic line that serves as a counter to the main melody. This is still an *mbaqanga* bass line, and what makes it new *mbaqanga* is the faster notes and more melodic content (Thorpe, 2018:54-55). Often anticipating the chord, Makwela makes small variations in feel and note placement and switches octaves leaving room for the melody and soloist (see Appendix 2).

What Makwela didn’t develop was a complete and responsive improvisational language. When he does take something of a solo in Example 1, it is more a repetition of the same motif (bb. 13-17) (see Appendix 2). A more expansive approach to improvisation, along with the integration of more varied techniques, rhythms, and melodic content, is what we will see in the work of the bassists discussed below. The trend towards melodic bass playing and exploration of the instrument’s capabilities is a fascinating process. The late 1970s and 1980s saw significant developments in South African electric bass playing. It is important to note

that an obstacle to its growth: apartheid's ideology of "separate development" affected music too, with Black radio stations actively obstructed from playing more contemporary urban musics like Afro-fusion and South African jazz (Martin, 2013:224).

Sipho Gumede: Steps ahead

Spirits Rejoice was ahead of its time in many ways. They were not as South African orientated as Sakhile but the fusion music they created was innovative, developing a similar sound to fusion artists and bands like Blood Sweat and Tears, Stanley Clarke (*School Days* 1976), Matrix (*Tale of the Whale* 1979) and Weather Report. Gumede's technical ability and melodic approach was an important part of this sound, and he openly explored innovative approaches to bass playing. Vusi Khumalo points out that Bakithi Kumalo was more studious than Gumede in following the top international players of the time such as Stanley Clarke and Jaco Pastorius (Khumalo interview, 2024:42-43). For context there was an immediate negative reaction by jazz upright bass players, such as Charles Mingus, Charlie Haden and Ron Carter, to the 'illegitimate cousin' the electric instrument due to its association with rock and a seeming lack of percussiveness (Dowdall, 2012:114-117).

The virtuosic playing of Jaco Pastorius is what Peter Dowdall points to as the turning point for the respectability of the electric bass in jazz. Having already released *Bright Size Life* (with Pat Metheny) and his self-titled solo record in 1976 he gained international fame with the release of *Heavy Weather* in 1977 (2012:170). But by 1978 Gumede had already developed his own approach to melodic bass playing, which I demonstrate through an analysis of his work on "Confusions" (1978). He was, one could argue, developing alongside other bassists, both local and international, so there was perhaps less need for him to consider what others were doing.

"Confusions" shifts key centres using a chord a half step up (or down) to create tension, also utilising tritone substitutions. The synth sounds by Mervyn Africa and horn arrangements (Robbie Jansen, Duke Makasi, George Tyefumani and Thabo Mashishi) interplay throughout the song with Gumede acting both as a rhythmic anchor and provider of additional melodic input (Doffman, 2008:170). The piece begins with Fender Rhodes and soprano saxophone playing a duo that brings to my mind Weather Report (1978: 0:01-1:03). A sentimental melody is contrasted by the following A section (see bar 39, Example 3) in which we hear

Latin horn lines, funk guitar, off-beat percussion, borderline manic drums and a distinctive and driving bass line.



Example 3.1. Gumede's bass on *Confusions* by Spirits Rejoice (1978) bars 39-40. My transcription.

Gumede's bass, along with the guitar, holds down the rhythm for this section, accenting the sixteenth-note upbeat until bar 55. This section is introduced with two bars of the drums playing the same rhythm as the bass (bar 33) and then a brass (samba-type) interlude. Latin music has distinct influence and similarities on/with South African genres such as *kwela*, *mbaqanga* and *ghoema* (Thorpe, 2018:63). Gumede ends each cycle with a rapid descending lick giving the groove its distinct clave-like character. The tempo gradually increases (from around 122bpm to 129bpm) along with the tension of this hammering section. Tempo changes are common and an important part of the jazz tradition; and in general there is a greater tolerance for an increase in tempo and less so for slowing down (Doffman, 2008:189).

Eventually, this section gives way to the still driving vamp from A to Ab where the feel shifts from the off-beat to the 1 and 3. Throughout the rest of this section Gumede builds his sound by keeping up with the lead instruments melodically. For example, where most bass players in bar 55 would have simply played root notes on the hits, Gumede plays a counter melody using hammer ons. The first time the listener can hear that this is a South African band is in bar 59 where Gumede uses a slide on the upbeat.¹⁸ Slides are a common characteristic in South African jazz (Johannes, 2010:27).

In traditional *mbaqanga* the "bass plays a more ornamental role while maintaining its function as the musical anchor harmonically and rhythmically" (Johannes, 2010:27). Gumede clearly expands on this the ornamentation function. This ornamentation can be heard throughout the song but most clearly in the solo section. The best examples being bars 77-79, 97, 116-119 (Appendix 2) (3:07-3:58, 1978). Overall he plays an integral role in the chordal and melodic parts of the song as seen below in Example 3.2.

¹⁸ Slides or glissando is a technique where a bassist plucks a note, holds their fingers down on the string and goes up the neck to another note on the string, moving through all of the pitches in between.



Example 3.2. Gumede's bass on 'Confusions' Spirits Rejoice (1978) bars 65-71. My transcription.

The bridge (see Example 3.2) is where Gumede stamps his mark on “Confusions”, relying on his unique style and harmonic sense. This section has a funk-type feel to it. I’ve transcribed it here in 4/4. But the correct feel is as a bar of 2/4 then 5/8 and then a bar of 4/4 (or 17/8 divided into 3); the extra quaver beat adding a lopsided feel to the repetition. This change in groove is ‘corrected’ in terms of bars to 4/4 by the G aeolian phrase in bar 69. Gumede plays the call and answer in this section joining the horns with sliding chordal hits. This blazingly fast phrase is doubled by the guitar and leads into a different call and answer (bar 71) between the horns and a diminished scale (half-whole) variation of the last section of the same phrase acting as a dominant substitution (for Eb7b9) to prepare the ear to go up a semitone to D major (Levine, 1995:81).

The solo section uses a tritone substitution F7 chord to build tension. Gumede keeps this four-bar vamp interesting by adding chromaticism, utilising the open A string and some creative pentatonic phrases. The freedom he gets to do this, rather than the guitar or keyboard taking the (improvisational) initiative, speaks to his harmonic sense and his leadership role in the band (Mahlangu interview, 2024:34). In bar 116 to the end of the solo section we hear him mirror Duke Makasi’s solo line before Makasi has even finished the line. Gumede rarely plays the same thing in this section and expertly gives the keyboards more space in the saxophone solo. All the while he never misses a note in the demanding bridge between solo sections.

This younger Gumede was seemingly chomping at the bit to further his sound. His move to Sakhile presents him in a different light. Sakhile’s “*Kuniswa Kudedelwane*” (translated to “in the neighbourhood”) (1982) may not have been the band’s most popular song, but I feel it shows the tempering of Gumede’s sound, towards not only a more South African-centric palette but also a calmer and more refined bass sound. Here we see a slightly older and ‘wiser’ Gumede writing and playing more ‘mature’ Afro-centric music. Gumede wrote the

majority of the band's music, and instead of mixing funk and Latin with a South African flavour, Gumede and Sakhile grounded their music in African melodic sensibility, experimenting with different grooves (such as swung, funk, straight and 6/8) (Mahlangu interview, 2024:33). Sakhile were, as the band's name states, building something new. The concept described by Marc Duby as 'edgewalking' was the product of genuine and thoughtful cultural crossing (Duby, 2013:9). Gumede's bass playing in this song shows a particularly wide range of textures and grooves.

The song begins with a laid back straight feel, characterised by the anticipated hits on the Ebm and DbΔ (bars 4, 12). This bass line can be understood as a contemporary variation of a classic *mbaqanga* bass motif seen for example in "Mannenbergr" (Thorpe, 2018:53-54). Then they use a demisemiquaver rest, creating late hits on the same chords (bars 15 and 17). There are also two shortened bars of 2/4 (8 and 23) which serve to interrupt the laid-back feel of the section and link to the swung section (Thorpe, 2018:25). Again, we hear Gumede playing more of a counter melody in addition to a conventional bass line, targeting the 9th of each chord and occupying the space between the melody.

The introduction to "*Kuniswa Kudedelwane*" is followed by full band blues scale/pentatonic line. The first bar (18) after the introduction is an anticipation of the main vocal melody. Gumede joins the melody in the swung section until bar 30, adding semi-quaver variations in bars 27 and 33, increasing the sense of rushing and dragging. These moments of additional melodic material and increased pace are musical and tactful; mostly added where the music could be losing momentum. There are also a lot more slides than in "Confusions". Bar 35 has an expertly crafted and executed full-band pentatonic lick (see Example 4.1.). This acts as a release to the build-up of the swung section and a transition back to the groove of the intro (which is the same as the A section). The vocals in the A section arrive over a minute into the song and are more of a chant or additional instrument than the focus of the song.



Example 4.1. "Kuniswa Kudedelwane" by Sakhile (1982) bars 33-39. My transcription.

The B section is made up of bass and drum hits giving the lyrics and percussion space to shine, but to me highlights Gumede's precise use of texture and volume. Gumede's tone has a fat neck pick-up¹⁹ crunch to it but still cuts through the mix with a distinct clarity (comparable to Stanley Clarke's early Alembic bass tone from *School Days* (1976) (Schroder, 2011:46). In the intro we hear a softer fingered more placid sound in his playing, while in the swung section he unlocks more of the cutting crunchy tone in these hits. From bars 57 to 65 we can hear the full spectrum of Gumede's tone, using ghost notes and a building up from a light touch to more of a full sound.²⁰ Then accented hits on bar 63 announce a tight, groovy and percussive C section from bar 63.



Example 4.2. “Kuniswa Kudedelwane” by Sakhile (1982) bars 64-71. My transcription.

In terms of micro-beats this groove (see Example 4.2) is slower at the beginning of the bar and builds in speed, and as a result adds tension, towards the anticipated root note on beat four and.²¹ Malcom Braff's theory of rhythmic harmonics can be applied here: the partials of the tonic 4/4 rhythm is polyrhythmic with a 6/8 partial. This is why the changes in feel, anticipations and different bar lengths feel natural. What is interesting is the wide variety of ways the musicians imply the different partials (polyrhythms) (de Wet, 2018:76). Gumede's grooves throughout the song are precise, from the more laid-back feeling of the intro and A section to the rushing and anticipation we see in the C section and in the semi-quaver lick in bars 70-71. They tend to ebb and flow naturally between rushing and dragging; the result of a good musical relationship with his drummer Mododa Mathunga (Doffman, 2008:154-155). From his early work in Spirits Rejoice and Sakhile, Gumede is more inclined towards

¹⁹ See the Glossary for the meaning of pickup.

²⁰ Ghost notes refer to muted, dead, silenced or false notes played by not fretting/muting the left hand and plucking with the right hand.

²¹ Microbeats are the inflections or small variations between beats. When one refers to pushing or pulling the beats it is the micro beats that one is playing (de Wet, 2017:73). Malcom Braff's theory revolves around beats having harmonics, different points of musical emphasis and correctness (de Wet, 2017:76). This can explain polyrhythms and variations in grooves as partials or upper extensions (harmonics) of the root beat.

pushing the tempo; his high energy and engaged style naturally would make him play ahead of the beat.

“When Days are Dark Friends are Few” (1997) represents the culmination of Gumede’s work. He released several solo albums between 1985 and 1997 but none achieved the success of *Blues for My Mother* (Sipho Gumede Discography) (apart from his live album at the Bassline in 1997). The harmonic and rhythmic complexity of his earlier work is not on display here, and presented rather is a simple three-section melody and two chordal sections, telling an emotive story. Gumede uses synth horns, clav synth, vocal synth, piano, bass and drums, playing (on bass) both the melody and bass lines in separate tracks. There are no effects on the bass, which sounds in progressively higher registers. The bass line presents no frills or fills. The tempo and drumbeat stay the same outside of a few fills. All of this is to stress the maturity and effectiveness of Gumede’s writing at this later stage of his career, using his bass to carry the entire 4:45 of the song, with a one and a half minute bass solo. This is unusual in a mainstream commercial music hit.

The bass melody, written in treble clef because of Gumede’s extended range on his six-string bass, begins with a short repetitive pentatonic lick, over a series of major triads. The A section of the melody (bb. 3-5) is also largely pentatonic with the rhythmic emphasis on the upbeat (beat 2). This sits further back in the mix and Gumede uses the bridge pick up creating a nasal quality. Despite being an upbeat song Gumede elicits a sense of longing and sadness with simple repetitions; with the second one always ending on a lower note. In the B section and A2, Gumede uses the natural minor (Aeolian) to create a further sense of longing. The B section harmony switches to predominantly minor chords (Cm, Gm, Fm and Bbmaj) in contrast to the overall feeling the song which is hopeful and optimistic.

Ornaments such as slides, grace notes, hammer ons can be heard throughout. Feya Faku attributes the use of these types of sounds as the result of South African jazz descending from largely vocal music traditions (Thorpe, 2018:69). In this song Gumede achieves a vocal quality: he ‘sings’ the melody with his bass.

In considering rhythmic characteristics of his style, Gumede often emphasises his melody and solo lines on beats 2, 4, 2-and as well as 4-and. He uses the snare on beat three as a cut off for most lines. This is part of an intentional spacing in order to give the bass melody the room it needs; for example the piano only plays motifs in the breaks between the bass melody.

The solo is comprised of diatonic pitches. In his analysis of Barney Rachabane's improvisation Kevin Davidson points out that playing fully within the harmony is a characteristic of what he calls 'African bebop'. Rachabane and Gumede were both fully capable of using chromaticism and hitting the changes but had the capability to 'reach deeper' within the bounds of diatonic tonality. Due to the cultural boycott South African musicians "were unhindered by any notion of preordained stock phrasing techniques and mass-produced 'schooled' approaches to improvisation" (2010:25). While "When Days are Dark" is a pop song, Gumede's solo harkens back to this characteristic of 'African bebop'.

He frequently draws on rhythmic variation, motifs, quick pentatonics, triplet intervallic or arpeggio licks and references to the melody, indicative of the 'South African feel' (Thorpe, 2018:71). He begins by referencing the B section melody in bar 88. In bars 92 and 93 we hear him go up using a semi-quaver triplet pentatonic lick with the 7th of the chord (G over Ab) being the target note then descending using staccato (scalar motion) in bars 95 and 97, further continuing down the pentatonic scale, then ascending using a series of triplet fourths (bars 99-101) (see Example 5.1).



Example 5.1. "When Days are Dark Friends are Few" by Sipho Gumede (1997) bars 99-101. My transcription.

The solo tells an emotive story. Gumede uses flashes of technique, but the majority of this solo could be a melody (see bars 103 to 120; Appendix 2). In bar 115 on Gumede's highest notes, the synth horns join in for hits, something I imagine was added after the solo was completed. A pentatonic motif that is repeated quite often is seen in bars 96 and 97 (with a triplet), bars 120 and 121, bar 127 (up a fourth), bar 137, bar 144 (up a fourth with a longer Eb which is the root of the chord) and directly afterwards in bar 145 (an extended variation). This works to tie the solo together (see Example 5.2).



Example 5.2. "When Days are Dark Friends are Few" by Sipho Gumede (1997) bars 119-121. My transcription.

There are a number of other notable moments such as triplet arpeggios in bars 121 and the use of hammer on chords in bar 133. What strikes me about this solo is the variety of diatonic tools Gumede has at his disposal, such that it never feels dull or planned out. He plays with a melodic idea and leads it into another one in what feels natural. This I think is what speaks to listeners: unfiltered, unpretentious and effective communication to a mass audience. And this on what is supposed to be a supporting instrument using the South African musical language he learnt and helped to develop (Thorpe, 2018:74).

Bakithi Kumalo: The local global bass player

As I discussed in the previous chapter, Bakithi Kumalo's career was driven by the recognition of an oppressed cultural and musical heritage and the consequent appreciation of African musics in general. He felt that jazz and western music were foisted on him by the apartheid system. Ironically he would garner mainstream success in America, being recognised as one of the top bass players in the world. In my interviews Kumalo told a story of self-discovery through traditional Sotho, Zulu and Pan-African musics (Kumalo interview, 2024) but Vusi Khumalo also had fond memories of their hard work to master the jazz and fusion music popular at the time (Khumalo interview, 2024:42). These realities are not incongruous, and make sense of Kumalo's artistic journey: understanding and mastering American musics but forging an original path based on southern African traditions.

The songs I chose for discussion here are for specific reasons. While there are many recordings of Kumalo's playing going back to 1979 Thetha was his band and main creative output in his early career, and so I chose the title song of their later album "Dark Street, Bad Night" (1986) for its display of Kumalo's musicality (particularly evinced in his solo). "You Can Call Me Al" by Paul Simon (1986) was an obvious choice due to its impact not just as a song in the pop and world music markets but also on the world of bass playing and pedagogy (and is included in Scott's Bass Lessons). "Papa" by Sankomota (1991) was chosen over many other later works (including Kumalo's solo records, and recordings with major American artists) because it highlights facets of Kumalo's Afro-centric identity and the impact of Lesotho's (Sotho) music in his development. The song has had a significant impact locally and Kumalo's playing is mature and still playful.

Aside from the fact that "Dark Street, Bad night" (1986) was written by Vusi Khumalo and Khaya Mahlangu plays the alto saxophone, the song was chosen largely because of Kumalo's brilliant solo and slap section. The song's style marks it as influenced by the development of

bubblegum after The Big Dudes featuring Brenda Fassie's release of Weekend Special in 1983 (Coplan, 2007:294).²² On the face of it, it is a pop-disco-funk song. It starts with a slide down from the note A, a type of slide more characteristic of funk than the ascending slides of South African bass playing; although overall the bass is responsible for much of the South African 'flavour' in the song. Playing an anticipated root over the bar line from beat four and a half of the first bar to beat one of the second bar Kumalo evokes the classic marabi bass line (seen in Thorpe's Figure 2.19) (2018:53). Playing on beat four and is something Kumalo does often. This is true of both the A section and B section, characterised by a ghost note in the B section and chord change to D major. The hesitations and implications of semi-quaver values in the A section are also a funk rhythm characteristic (Abel, 2014:71).

Kumalo uses a chorus effect²³ on the solo and his bridge pick up, the classic Pastorius set up (Dowdall, 2012:188). With his hallmark Washburn bass there is a distinct Kumalo character to the tone, and it also sounds like he is playing further away from the bridge than Pastorius. The solo is something of a sonic painting, opening (bar 105) with a sliding major 6th interval, then a crescendo of semi-quavers building into an enclosure. In his study of South African jazz pianist Bheki Mseleku, David Cousins notes that chromatic passing (bebop) notes are not as common in South African jazz language, but Mseleku does use enclosures (2018:59); as do the bassists I focus on. Kumalo builds on this harmonic idea in bars 109-111, adding (in bar 109) a F# Aeolian lick and then returning to the A major enclosure. He next descends with arpeggios down an octave to the same enclosure but doesn't play the E (5th) below resolving this idea to the root.

²² Bubble gum was the newest township style of the time, supplanting 'Soweto Soul' and Harari's African rock. With its roots in local popular balladry and infused with political/social commentary, this local pop genre developed through the 1980s and peaked in parallel with the anti-apartheid movement (Coplan, 2007:293-295), giving way to Kwaito in the 1990s (Coplan, 2007:327).

²³ See Glossary for a definition of chorus effect.

Example 6.1 Kumalo’s Bass on “Dark streets, Bad night” by Thetha (1986) bars 105-122. My transcription.

In bars 112 and 113 we hear masterfully placed harmonic slides (such as those on Pastorius’s “Portrait of Tracy” (1976)). Performed best on fretless bass, a harmonic slide is created when one hits the harmonic immediately pressing down on the neck then slides up, in this instance creating an interval of a major 7th. Kumalo even adds vibrato to these harmonic slides. At this point (b. 113) Kumalo begins a new melodic idea riffing groups of four semi-quavers. A

highlight of the solo is the simple and crisply executed slide up into his upper register (E) and descending E Mixolydian (b. 117).



Example 6.2 Kumalo's Bass on "Dark streets, Bad night" by Thetha (1986) bars 187-197. My transcription.

The slap²⁴ section between bar 175 and 192 is classic Kumalo from this era, in which he still use a chorus effect but switches to the neck pick up. Its serves as a second solo in the song. His use of octave slides and double stops in the middle of the slap section (bb. 184-188) is highly original, and the triplets in bar 191 are technically difficult using the classic slap style, that is with out Victor Wooten's double thumb technique (Schroeder, 2012:54) (Appendix 2). It is also worth noting that playing slap on fretless bass is more difficult, due to the lack of frets for the string to resonate off and flat wound strings being tighter. Kumalo needs to be more precise in the amount of power he slaps with in order to maintain his intonation and avoid buzz from the neck.

Kumalo's iconic bass line in "You Can Call Me Al" (1986) was a defining moment of his career, and can be considered a fateful moment or critical incident in Smilde's terms (2011:143). With this simple bass line Kumalo was able to bring attention to South African bass. Despite the song's lyrics having nothing to do with South Africa nor its music on the whole there are nevertheless references to kwela (penny whistle), the bass slides of mbaqanga and other South African musics throughout. There is also the issue of the editing and postproduction of the song in New York, so it difficult to know what exactly Kumalo actually performed (Meintjies, 1990:57).

²⁴ See Glossary for bass slap definition.

The verse is played with slap and the chorus with fingerstyle. Slap is more percussive (with the addition of ghost notes) and has less low end, where finger style²⁵ is lower register and drives the chorus. The feel is characterised by two F sixteenth notes leading into a quaver triad, followed by the same pattern except with G over the A and C triad, after which he plays the C on the last quaver of the bar (four and) after the snare. The displaced bass line targets the up beats (1 and 2 and, 4 and). This works as a vamp for the synth, guitar, and vocals to play over. In the space between beats two and four Kumalo adds a number of creative fun licks and slides throughout, notably in bar 89 with a quick flurry of slaps (see Example 7.1). At the beginning of each verse Kumalo transitions to slap with a crotchet on beat four, and this in combination with the drum fill gives the chorus a sense of finality.



Example 7.1. Kumalo's Bass on "You Can Call Me Al" by Paul Simon (1986) bars 89-91. My transcription.

Kumalo did overdubs, doubling Ladysmith Black Mambazo's vocal lines and adding additional melodic content in bars 19-23, 42-49, 67-73, 90-97 and 114-121. We hear these lines by themselves in bars 67-73. Bar 22 interestingly has some overdubbed or spliced in octave slaps, which suggests there are at points three overdubbed bass tracks. The most well-known overdub and bass lick in the song occurs in bars 122-123. Here Kumalo only played the descending line, with the ascending line being a reverse delay²⁶ effect employed by the engineer (SBL Youtube). Perhaps the most impressive feat was Kumalo then relearning the lick in reverse for live performances.

Kumalo's work on "Papa" by Sankomota (1989), represents I think what Kumalo characterises as his fully developed style, a tasteful deployment of an Afro-centric bass

²⁵ See Glossary for a definition of finger style technique.

²⁶ See Glossary for what reverse delay is.

playing: “You know, so me, I just cut it down to make it simpler by being part of the voice of the traditional thing” (Kumalo interview, 2024:3). His playing is less about flashy bursts of speed or slap, and more about the tone and placement of his bass and melodic lines. “Papa” has had a significant impact locally, continuing to be played on radio to this day. This slower (between 84 and 90 bpm), meaningful song by a Sotho band showcases expressive South African bass playing.

“Papa” begins with the piano simply running through the chords, after which Kumalo slides in with a ‘fatter’ (more bassy sound) than we have heard from him in the other songs I discussed. Audible is the now well-established characteristic early hit on the first E7 (b. 7), which continues throughout the song at this spot in the chord cycle. Another common motif used is the descending triplet triad on the A chord (b. 5). Kumalo employs many exceptionally smooth slides throughout. The guitar carries the melody up until A (b. 25) (1989:1:09). Two moments from the first page of my transcription I would like to highlight are bars 20 and 36.



Example 8.1. Kumalo’s Bass on “Papa” by Sankomota (1989) bars 18-21. My transcription.

Bar 20 (see Example 8.1) has a deceptively difficult to play line (doubled with guitar) sliding onto the chord tones. Kumalo adjusts intonation and string jumps perfectly. Bar 36 is a tasteful double stop utilising the open A. The B section or chorus comes in bar 41. In bar 48 Kumalo fills the space with a semi-quaver note B dorian line over E7 performing a similar line an octave down in bar 54. These bursts of pace are well placed and evenly played. Kumalo’s work in “Papa” is a masterclass in the use of slides, with the bassist often sliding both into and off notes as heard in bars 69 and 85. Bars 60, 76 and 103 are the only points with subtle bits of additional melodic content in this long A section/verse.

In the following B section Kumalo builds in the spirit of the song, first with a quiet arpeggio in bar 108 then a loud pop in bar 109. Interestingly Kumalo avoids the snare always playing before beat two and/or four and (with a good example heard in bar 107 where, even when adding long notes, he still stops before the snare hits), so that this pop comes just after the snare.



Example 8.2. Kumalo's Bass on "Papa" by Sankomota (1989) bars 107-109. My transcription.

In bar 116 he finally lets a descending triplet line rip and it's very satisfying. In bar 122 he begins slapping, which works well to add more percussive sounds over the low male choir. Bar 129 he has a short solo of sorts, bringing the song down to earth before the guitar solo. playing with a beautiful tone, Kumalo chooses his notes carefully. This is more of a bass melody than a solo but perfectly characterises Kumalo's approach. "So, my approach to fretless, I think, like, it is a melodic instrument. Like, you know, you have, it's a voice" (Kumalo interview, 2024:3). Kumalo lets loose during the guitar solo from bar 137 to the end of the song, but this comes in the form of sixteenth-note variations on the bass line. In bars 148 and 152 we hear him play extended lines and bar 164 features descending sliding octaves. Perhaps the most surprising thing here is that Kumalo was playing a five-string instrument, only using the low B string for the first time in bar 158.



Example 8.3. Kumalo's Bass on "Papa" by Sankomota (1989) bars 152-159. My transcription.

From these three examples we see a diverse sonic palette in terms of Kumalo's rhythm and groove. His playing on all three is tight, often using mbaqanga-style anticipated notes. In "Papa" he mostly plays ahead of the beat, using anticipations and slides to anticipate notes. Despite this the song's overall feel is tight even with the liberties he takes melodically. In "Dark Street, Bad Night" he plays a funk feel with South African inflections, with the groove

being so tight it could be played to a metronome. Fana Zulu, whose work I discuss next, was much influenced by Kumalo, particularly in his tight sense of groove. Zulu in effect distilled Kumalo’s sound, particularly his groove, to its bare bones and built his own version of a bass forward five-string sound.

Fana Zulu: A rock amongst stones

Zulu is known for his solid groove and inventive bass lines with a unique (upside down) playing style. He took up the mantle of the traditional marabi bassist but modernised it (Johannes, 2012:27). Some of the many options in Zulu’s vast discography I might have selected for discussion would be his work with Sakhile, Jimmy Dlodlu or Hugh Masekela. But to gain an accurate window into Zulu’s early career I chose to focus on Bayete’s “Mbombela” (1987) on which he built his career, and which is characterised by solid grooves and tasteful storytelling. This was the most impactful recordings of his early career. In “Mountain Shade” (Moses Taiwa Molelekwa, 1994) we see him stretch his legs and express his creative side.

“Mbombela” was Bayete’s breakout hit. Coplan characterises the band’s music as “neo-traditional popular” (2007:304), with the song’s lyrics referring to the cramped spaces on a train – *mbombela*’s meaning in Siswati – that black South Africans endured on the trains during forced urbanisation (Coplan, 2007:110). The song opens with Themba Mkhize’s jangly piano for three bars, and the second thing we hear is Zulu’s opening line (see Example 9.1).

Example 9.1. Zulu’s bass in “Mbombela” by Bayete (1987) bars 4-12. My transcription.

Zulu's tone has some of the crunch of Gumede and some of the smoothness of Kumalo but he plays with a lot more bass or sub in his sound. This opening line goes up the E Locrian scale, landing on the third of the root (A), then in bar 6 he repeats a variation of this lick. This repetition builds into a masterfully placed descending (in sets of three) pentatonic lick ending in a squiggle on F. 'Squiggles', sliding vibrato between notes popularised by Paul Jackson (of Head Hunters)²⁷ (Dowdall, 2012:162), are typically played on the higher strings where it is more comfortable to reach. Zulu's E string is where most bassist's G string is and his 'upside down' approach may explain this particular inflection.

The effectiveness of the drop into the vocal and bass groove is palpable. Zulu's timing and feel are legendary and the precision that he approaches this song with is no exception. The groove has a characteristic South African syncopation and emphasis landing on the eighth note after the down-beat (beat 2) (Thorpe, 2018:67-68). The A section bass line doubles the opening melody with the addition of a quick ascending Phrygian lick at the end of the second repeat filling the space left by the vocals. This bass line repeats over a horn section and then to a variation vocal vamp in bar 25. Jabu Khanyile joins at this stage with some vocalisations but only begins the verse in bar 33. The influence of *isicathamiya* can be heard in the backing choir (with vocals credited to Victor Nyathi). In the A section bass line, piano, drums and vocals the listener gets the sense of the relentless motion of a train moving. One could interpret the explosive drop in bar 9 as the train beginning to move and the opening bass melody or solo as heartfelt goodbyes at the station (1987: 0:18-1:55).

In terms of groove the song is played to a click track, so there is no variation in tempo. But there is a slightly rushed upbeat (beat two) and late (the last semi-quaver of beat four) second snare hit which creates a lopsided rhythm. The chorus opens up the feel still using the rushed up beat but instead of every second bar the snare plays every bar. This beat is similar to a common *mbaqanga* groove (as seen in Figure 1.2 in Johannes 2010:29), and lends a sense of further forward motion. As for Zulu's bass line in the chorus, he locks in with the drums using octave and thirds to play the quarter notes, using a similar chromatic open string hammer on motif as Gumede in "Confusions" over the dominant chord (C7 and F7

²⁷ Paul Jackson was an American funk bass player with a high level of improvisational skill and ingenuity in his bass lines, best known for his work with Herbie Hancock through out the 1970s in the band Head Hunters (Farberman, 2021).

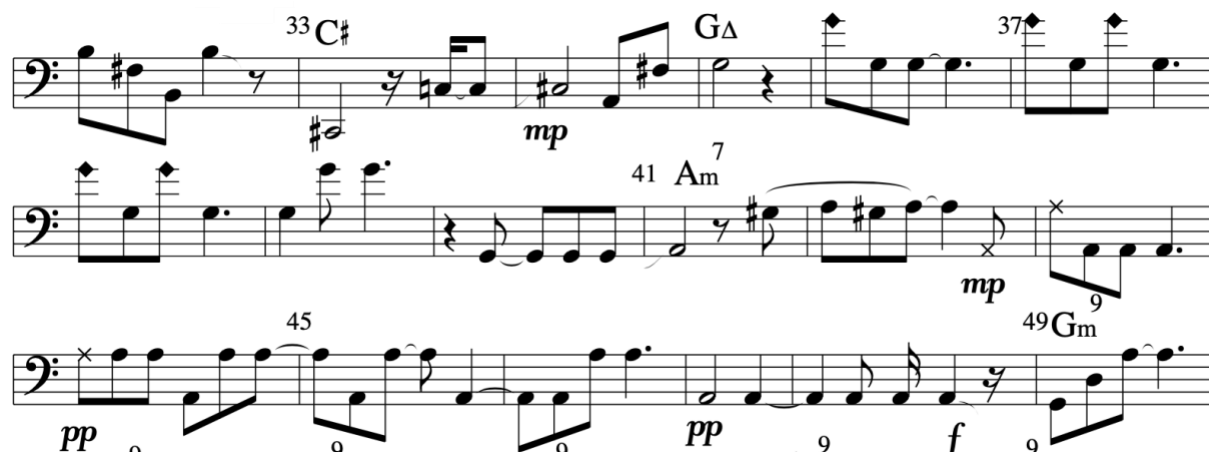
respectively). In bar 60 we see a variation of this lick on the D string between the 3rd and 5th of the C7 chord.



Example 9.2. Zulu's bass in "Mbombela" by Bayete (1987) bars 133-134. My transcription.

In bars 133-134 (Example 9.2) Zulu begins a Joseph Makwela-style semi-quaver bass line to close out the song, joining the semi-quaver hi-hats that have been present for most of the song, in a variation which gives the ending more drive and energy.

In Moses Taiwa Molelekwa's "Mountain Shade" of 1994 Zulu's interactive and high level improvisational skill is demonstrated. Molelekwa was 20 years old at the time of the recoding, pushing Fana Zulu, McCoy Mrubata and Vusi Khumalo, all seasoned veterans in their prime, to do take after take of these tunes (Zulu interview, 2024:21). The song is 9 minutes and 24 seconds long, and the tightness and quality of play Zulu achieves in this marathon is exceptional. There is much here one could note and so I only highlight particularly interesting bass playing content.



Example 10.1. Zulu's bass in "Mountain Shade" by Moses Taiwa Molelekwa (1994) bars 32-49. My transcription.

Zulu's use of slides, harmonic and ghost notes through bars 32 to 49 add significantly to the texture of the piece (see Example 10.1 for instances of this). While Molelekwa plays light piano/synth sounds, Zulu plays in the spaces between freely complementing the melody. His bass slides, in bars 31, 34, 41 and 48 are used in a different way from what we have seen in

typical South African bass playing, and rather than adding impact they complement the softness and delicacy of this section. The ghost notes (bb. 42, 43 and 44) balance this by adding rhythmic texture to what might otherwise be a monotonous bass line. The harmonics (bb. 36-38) are both percussive and delicate in a call and answer with the melody, and from my experimentation more difficult for Zulu to execute as he has to reach over with his little finger lower string to get the harmonic. Outside of these inflections Zulu sticks tightly to the groove, often joining the piano left hand (bb. 49-57 and 86 to 93) playing the dramatic dynamics built into Molelekwa's masterpiece. McCoy Mrubata joins from bar 99, which lifts the piece's dynamic range and Zulu reacts, such that in the full band melody line from bars 128 to 137 Zulu's tone sings and cuts through.

During the saxophone solo section (bb. 138-202) the tempo gradually increases with the micro beats of the grooves stressing a slow-slow-slow-fast feel (in reference to each beat). The stress on the slightly delayed final quarter note or dotted quarter (it is somewhere in-between) creates a bounce within the feel. It is generally agreed that micro beats can be subdivided from two or three macro beats. This isochronous (that is, the normal metre) micro beat varies between instruments and on each repeat. Sometimes they are 'in time' and sometimes they are rushed or dragged depending on whether one hears this as a quarter note or dotted quarter note (de Wet, 2017: 93-94). What Doffman would call the phase deviation between the drums and bass are minimal, and Khumalo and Zulu lay a solid foundation for the saxophone and keys to play over. In jazz, the bass acts as the anchor and the drums as a mediator to the soloist (2008:170). For the majority of this song Zulu takes on that role.



Example 10.2. Zulu's bass in "Mountain Shade" by Moses Taiwa Molelekwa (1994) bars 218-228. My transcription.

Zulu has more space for improvisation during the piano solo, during which he and Khumalo engage in impressive interplay between bars 218 and 225 (Example 10.2). Khumalo plays a polyrhythm going into 4/4 (preempting the switch in bar 340) and Zulu compliments it with pulling the feel but maintaining the 6/8 (4:47-4:56). From here until bar 249 Zulu employs ghost notes adding them on beat three to create texture and momentum. Zulu's playing

always seems to build methodically. At the next double time section (b. 250) he slowly adds more fills until bar 273 where he fully kicks in, peaking with the motif over D major he uses in bar 293 and builds on in bar 297 (Example 10.3). As is evident in Example 10.3 there are only two bars (292 and 296) without a fill.



Example 10.3. Zulu's bass in "Mountain Shade" by Moses Taiwa Molelekwa (1994) bars 292-297. My transcription.

The tightness of the band to my ear is due not simply to a band that has been well rehearsed, but stems from a group of musician who are fully committed, emotionally and spiritually, to the performance of this work. The dynamic shifts Zulu and Khumalo achieve (see page 6, Appendix 2) following Molelekwa perfectly can result only from being fully 'locked in'.

In the switch to 4/4 and 70bpm (close to half time) at bar 340 Zulu continues to imply the 6/8 feel employing slides and rhythmic groups of three semi-quaver notes, and utilising the low B string with some guttural sounding slides and ghost notes in bars 349 to 351. This builds nicely back into the A section. Overall, this song is high-risk for a bass player, where over playing or underplaying could be detrimental to the performance. Zulu threads this needle and complements Molelekwa's genius with his experience and carefully crafted support.

Spencer Mbadu: A bassist's bass player

Another master at supporting the band is Spencer Mbadu. Characterised by Ansell as the bass players' bass player,

He was that quiet, solid presence at the back of the stage – often, in his later years, in his trademark back-to-front cap – doing the essential job of holding the music together and making sure everybody on stage sounded good (2023).

Mbadu is the least recorded but most extensively academically studied of my subjects.

Johannes's "Bassists of Ikapa" explored his playing with Winston Mankunku and Errol Dyers

in detail, and my Honours research essay focused on Mbadu's playing with Mankunku. For this thesis I have transcribed two quite traditional bass lines from his earlier work with Abdullah Ibrahim, "Bayi Lam" and "Tsakwe / Royal Blue" (1991). I briefly refer to two other transcriptions of his playing, "Lagunya Khayelitsha" and "Khanya" (1997). My aim here is to show Mbadu's creativity, great sense of feel, his respect for tradition and musicality. I also touch on his unique techniques and technical ability.

Johannes consistently likens Mbadu to a combination of Joseph Makwela and Jaco Pastorius (2010:68-70). While this comparison is apt and encompasses large parts of Mbadu's playing, I would add Johnny Gertze and Stanley Clarke as points of comparison. Mbadu's tone, rock influences, slap style was very Clarke-esque and his walking, traditional rhythmic application and swing feel were influenced by Gertze.

In "Bayi Lam" Mbadu's tone is fat, smooth and bass heavy; with just enough treble to hear the quick ghost and muted notes, likely achieved with his four-string active Ibanez bass guitar. Mbadu described his fretted bass sound as a "fat sound with a solid slap and nice sizzle" (Mbadu in Johannes, 2010:50). He uses the neck pick up and plays further up the neck to mimic the tone of an upright bass. For such a relaxed or laid-back song what strikes me is how busy Mbadu is. The progression is the traditional I-IV-V in Eb and Mbadu makes an original and diverse show case of 'African jazz'²⁸ walking bass. I describe his bass as African jazz here, not *ghoema*, because the drum rhythm is slow, swung and lacks the trademark *ghoema* pattern (Thorpe, 2018:35-36). The melody only has hi-hats to keep rhythm, so the bass injects much of the energy and drives the song while still maintaining the laid-back feel. Walking bass is the art of balancing groove, melodic lines, creating interest with movement, fresh ideas and complementing the soloist or melody (Patitucci, 2021:15-16); and Mbadu achieves this flawlessly.

Mbadu frequently uses arpeggiated, descending quaver triplets most often on beat three, ghost notes, grace notes, micro rests between walking notes, slides, chromaticism both as approach notes and (bebop) scalar (Patitucci, 2021:15). As indicated at the top of the transcription (see Appendix 2), I have used a dotted quaver and semi-quaver to stand for a swung triplet, which is used most often on beats 1 and 3. These triplets work both to affirm

²⁸ See Glossary for one definition of African jazz.

the swung feel and push the groove. The grace notes seen mostly on the open G string work to this same effect, creating a sense of movement and affirming the syncopated swing groove.

Generally, Mbadu uses more grace notes in the first melody section, thus effectively establishing the swing groove. He always plays an ascending arpeggio on the first bar of the Bb (V) chord (either a one three five or one five octave) with the exception being in bar 94 where he plays up the scale. Mbadu also frequently uses contrary motion, walking up as the melody or chords go down and vice versa (Levine, 1997:312). As John Patitucci says in his book *Walking Bass*: “The role of the bass player has always been to provide a strong harmonic foundation” (2021:15). This is exactly what Mbadu does, even with all of his flurries, rhythmic play and melodic expression he establishes the root at the beginning of the chords, highlights the chords tones and expertly sustains the laid-back swing groove.



Example 11.1. Mbadu’s bass in “Bayi Lam” by Abdullah Ibrahim (1991) bars 68-72. My transcription.

An example of an Mbadu flurry occurs in bar 71 at the end of the trumpet solo, where Johnny Mekoa’s trumpet repeats a polyrhythmic (triplet) phrase from C to Eb to F (respectively the 9th, 11th and 5th of the chord Bb) emphasising the tension of the cadence. Mbadu reacts to this repetition as an opportunity both for rhythmical interplay and to add melodic content. He plays a quaver triplet descending line, highlighting the chord tones and playing the ninth and sixth as approach notes. This works to break the monotony of the trumpet’s line, further highlight the tension notes and give a sense of finality to Mekoa’s solo.



Example 11.2. Mbadu’s bass in “Bayi Lam” by Abdullah Ibrahim (1991) bars 88-92. My transcription.

To end the first cycle of the saxophone (bb. 88 and 89) he creates a brilliant aural effect by sliding up and descending Eb major using different intervals, targeting the chord tones (see Example 11.2). First, he slides up to Eb then plays the tenth (major third), then uses two fourth intervals on the fifth and third. As represented on the chart at various points during the solo Mbadu implies the ii (Fm) over Ab. This creates a ii-V-I and is a minor substitution (see Appendix 2). In bar 69 he changes this to an F with a major third, which functions as a dominant chord, and which Levine identifies as “anticipating a chord with its V chord” (1997:336). This shows Mbadu’s knowledge of harmony and is a subtle clever change to the traditional African jazz approach.

Moments of rhythmic interest include bar 47, where Mbadu delays the root by a quaver note on Eb. There is something about this that, for lack of a better expression, swings hard. This adds interest to the end of the second melody, and Mbadu reestablishes the groove with a triplet. He does a minim slide in bars 36 to 37, which has a similar effect: it creates a moment of floating suspense between the two melody lines.

The synchronisation between Mbadu and Monty Weber (drums) is uncanny. Weber is mostly holding the 2 and 4 down on his hi-hat, whilst swinging with Mbadu on the ride and painting (improvising) between beats with his snare: usually on late micro-beats. At bar 61 Mbadu plays a lopsided crotchet triplet, which Weber somehow hears coming and perfectly mimics Mbadu’s rhythm on the cymbals. And then in bar 70 Mbadu plays a ghost note between beats three and four, which Weber doubles (1991: 1:34-1:50). There are many of these examples and what is so impressive is that Weber is playing so little, so every additional note is precisely placed and chosen. Overall Mbadu’s walking bass style is one that is not afraid to take risks. He respects and nurtures the traditions and conventions of the music using them to his creative advantage, using just the right amount of repetition and new material to sustain the song.

Abdullah Ibrahim’s “Tsakwe / Royal Blue” of 1991 has, since its release, become a standard within the South African repertoire, and is likely the most impactful recording of Mbadu’s career. Here again, I focus on Mbadu’s musical choices, honing in on where he deviates from the set bass line and why. The solidness of the groove and frenetic energy Mbadu provides is palpable. The tempo (around 135 bpm) and groove are steady throughout, and the dominant

rhythm is derived from *ghoema*.²⁹ The harmonic structure of the song is a minor blues, with the melody played over the harmonic minor scale. Ibrahim's *ghoema* is a modern version, influenced by jazz and Latin musics (Thorpe, 2018:63-64).

There are two basic bass lines used by Mbadu throughout the song, one is the melody bass line (Example 12.1), used as a vamp on Gmin to start the song, and the other is the solo bass line (Example 12.2).



Example 12.1. Mbadu's bass in "Tsakwe/Royal Blue" by Abdullah Ibrahim (1991) bars 4-5. My transcription.



Example 12.2. Mbadu's bass in "Tsakwe/Royal Blue" by Abdullah Ibrahim (1991) bars 70-71. My transcription.

The vamp and melody bass line ascends to the 5th of the minor scale, it is played staccato and Mbadu bounces between notes. He plays tightly on top of the beat until beats three and four, where he splits the fourth (C) mirroring the *ghoema* rhythm (Thorpe, 2018:61). The solo section bass line varies more than the regimented melody line, sometimes adding an extra note in beat three or changing the 5th to an octave; and it also emulates the drums as they

²⁹ *Ghoema* can be traced back to the influence of Malay culture in the Cape and the ratiép music based on the tumboa rhythm, which was then mixed with *marabi*, *mbaqanga* and vaudeville (Thorpe, 2018:60). See Glossary for detailed definition.

switch to playing the upbeats on beats two and four. In bars 99, 110 and 112 a small variation adds an extra note to the 3rd on Cm and Gm respectively.



Example 12.3. Mbadu's bass in "Tsakwe/Royal Blue" by Abdullah Ibrahim (1991) bars 118-126. My transcription.

A substantial variation takes place in bars 118-125. Mbadu begins by sliding into the root and 5th at the beginning of the cycle. On the Cm he takes one of his riffs from the ii-V i-playing between the root and 5th of the chord. To prepare each chord change he adds a bar of walking. Both of these choices are grounded in *ghoema* bass, the use of the root 5th pedal (below and above) and preparation of the chord changes through melodic or walking lines can both be seen in many *ghoema* bass lines (Johannes, 2010:35). These variations are familiar or traditional enough to not affect this steam train of a groove but still build and add energy.

His main opportunity for improvisation comes in the ii-V-i at the end of each cycle. This in itself is line with traditional *ghoema* bass. The bass would take a 'leading' line to prepare each chord change (Johannes, 2010:35). In bar 33 he counterintuitively plays G major over G minor with a chromatic note between the 4th and 5th. To me this sounds like it functions as a dominant substitution, playing the upper extensions (7th, 11th, 13th and #13th) indicating a V (D7) i (Gm). It can simply be understood as reharmonisation as explained in Levine's reference to "Whats New" (1997:277), but at the end of most cycles Mbadu lands on D to imply the V. Either way it sounds natural or correct as well as quirky and is an interesting choice. In most of the ii-V-i progressions he uses slides on the respective 5ths of the ii and V, and on the i he either double time walks over a ii-V or chromatically approaches it.

Mbadu's practice is a balance of tradition and individual expression, solidity and exploration, Makwela and Pastorius. In bar 127 we see a variation over the V (D) where in beat three he plays quaver octaves then two quick semi-quaver root and 5ths. In bar 152, and over the i (Gm), Mbadu pushes the tempo and energy with a dotted quaver (root) and semi-quaver (5th)

then in bar 153 beat four plays a very quick descent back into the groove. In bars 162 to 163 we hear him ascend over the ii-V (using A aeolian with chromaticism) with semi-quavers delayed by a semi-quaver rest, and in doing so he creates a sensation of leaning back while one's body is falling forwards (Example 12.4).



Example 12.4. Mbadu's bass in "Tsakwe/Royal Blue" by Abdullah Ibrahim (1991) bars 160-164. My transcription.

These may seem like inconsequential variations, but few bassists have the technical ability to play so freely and support the groove the way Mbadu does. Even fewer would take the risks he does (especially while playing for Ibrahim). These examples demonstrate what one might call the more traditional side of Mbadu's playing. In what follows I briefly bring to light other elements of his style.

There are already comprehensive analyses of Winston Mankunku and Mike Perry's "Khanya" and "Lagunya Khayelitsha" (from the album *Molo Africa*) (see Johannes, 2010:61-70 and Hardcastle, 2020:14-16). so my discussion of them is limited to select aspects of Mbadu's idiolect. What initially struck me about Mbadu's playing when I was his student was his use of unique techniques and sounds. He would grow his nails to get a better pluck from the bass (possibly to emulate the attack of a pick like Joseph Makwela). He had a unique way of slapping the string with his index finger by pressing it against his middle finger and flinging it off onto the string. He was an excellent chordal bass player, as seen in "Khanya" (1998). His slap sound was full and exceptionally tight and fast. He played "Portrait of Tracy" (1976) as well as I have heard it done by anyone. He told me that when he was in Johannesburg if any bass player came to a jam or rehearsal and tried to show him up, he would play that song and that would keep them quiet.

According to Mbadu *Molo Africa* was an artistic awakening for him in which he was able to explore the more creative side of his musicianship (Mbadu interview, 2020). We see a fuller expansion of his playing in “Khanya”. Here he walks, slaps, plays chords and expresses his wider musicality. “Lagunya Khayelitsha” shows the influence of fusion, particularly of Pastorius, which he combines with *mbaqanga*, thereby modernising *mbaqanga* and *ghoema* the same way Makwela did (Martin, 2013:245; Johannes, 2010:68). Mbadu was not only a great bass player in the traditional sense but needs to be acknowledged as a unique creative force within South African jazz.

Carlo Mombelli: Time, Tone, Zen, Zone

Mombelli has a substantial discography of his own compositions, which have been transcribed and published in his book *Pulses in the Centre of Silence* (2019). As a result I have transcribed three of his early solos, discussing them in order of the year that they were composed rather than recorded, because it reflects his development and compositional direction. His approach to time and technical ability, which I describe in depth below, made doing these transcriptions demanding despite only being a couple of pages. I consider “My Friends and I” (1984) primarily for Mombelli’s rhythmic approach, “Remember Lucia” (1987) which elucidates his harmonic practice and approach to playing over changes, and “Dancing in a Museum” (1992) which demonstrates his overall musical sensibility and composer’s approach to improvisation and performance.

Mombelli’s key influences include Eberhard Weber and Jaco Pastorius (Mombelli interview, 2024:56). I characterise his style as a South African interpretation of a European jazz aesthetic, with fusion and Brazilian influences. Particularly influential is the ECM aesthetic “known for its syncretism of jazz, folk, rock, classical, world music, and the avant-garde” (Angelo, 2021:3). Early on ECM artists moved away from traditional walking bass and drum grooves of mainstream jazz, favouring a freer approach involving more interplay as evident in Paul Motian and Gary Peacock’s playing on “When Will the Blues Leave?” (1970) by Ornette Coleman performed by the Paul Bley Trio (Angelo, 2021:23).

For the recordings of the works I consider Mombelli used a 1976 Fender jazz bass and fretless Ibanez. The tone is rolled down, mids boosted and bass is flat, and at this time Mombelli liked to keep his pickup blend at roughly 80% bridge pick up and 20% neck. This resulted in a thicker sound than the classic ‘Jaco’ tone which is 100% bridge pick up.

Mombelli usually plays with a small amount of reverb on his bass, increasing it in solo sections. I have studied with Mombelli for nearly seven years, and have played and studied a lot of his music and been mentored in his approach. So, I have a lot of nuggets of information from his teachings and approach outside of his writings and our interview.

In “My Friends and I” (composed in 1984, and released in 1990) Mombelli, Peter O’Mara and Bill Elgart play a sensitive, contemplative, and slow song (Discogs). The song was written when Mombelli left his first band and joined Johnny Fourie, perfectly encapsulating the theme of the album *Happy/Sad* (1990). It is less experimental and ‘abstract’ than a lot of Mombelli’s early work. The melody, drums and bass are played with respect towards the composition and purposefully not overplayed. Mombelli’s approach to groove is fluid, playing in what he call’s “free time”. He uses a tempo, drag, rubato and breath markers and other indications to the band to guide the music (Mombelli, 2019: 50-164).

This approach runs deep in Mombelli’s music and teachings, creating a sense of time that feels ‘natural’ and flows, in order that the musicians keep their breath in line with their playing. The slow tempo of 50bpm (speeding up slightly by the time of the bass solo to 52bpm) is a challenge for any trio to stay locked in and feel the groove and breathe each beat in sync with each other. The overall feel is laid-back but at key moments the group lifts the tempo and dynamics, ebbing and flowing (or rushing and dragging), increasing the impact of the simple but beautiful melody. Mombelli adds a few ad libs towards the end of the melody, but other than that it is played as written. Here he plays a fretted Fender, but because of his precision, slides, and years of playing fretless it still often sounds like one (1990: 0:00-1:17).

The focus on breathing is especially applicable when one is soloing; it is an attempt to emulate the flow of the human voice and body. This requires resting between phrases and not playing over the other musicians. This in combination with his free time approach is why for the first eight bars of his solo (bb. 17-22) he doesn’t start or end a phrase on the first beat of the bar. He leaves space for the guitar to establish the chord and then replies. These first bars are a conversation with the melody, building on the simple motif in bar 17, and targeting the chord tones mostly using 3rds and approach notes. We hear Mombelli’s use of hammer ons,

pull offs and slides. His bass sings through the changes, an effect amplified by the displacement of his phrases.



Example 13.1. “My Friends and I” by Carlo Mombelli (1990) bar 23. My transcription.

In bar 23 (see Example 13.1), and after a deep breath, Mombelli ascends G major, descends via 3rds for six notes then transitions back to a scalar descent via F# minor to the 5th (C#). He drags on his way up and rushes on his way down, giving an intended vocal-speech quality to the line. This both builds on the previous ideas (using similar 3rds and approach notes) and develops a new one for him to take into the key change. The triplet line at the end of bar 23 that finishes in 24 is the new motif. His transition into the new key is the first time he plays on beat 1, and it is slightly rushed. The impact of the minor 3rd highlights the transition from major to minor. It is a simple but effective move, emphasising the happy/sad duality thematised in the album.

After an expressive line in bar 25 and hitting his upper register (F4), Mombelli explodes into a passionate set of runs. Playing around with the triplet motif, he comes out of this with a third motif in bar 27 playing with the interval of a 5th (specifically hitting two demisemiquavers and going down a 5th). He uses the E minor to calm things down and plays dotted demisemiquavers softly. Dynamic variation is an important feature of his sound, and Mombelli is not afraid to quickly transition between different volumes using these to create tonal differences. In bar 28 while playing around with the third theme he inserts the second theme to transition back to B minor, not as a triplet but still immediately recognisable.



Example 13.2. “My Friends and I” by Carlo Mombelli (1990) bar 30. My transcription.

Bar 30 (see Example 13.2) is the subtle climax of the solo taking the third motif, inverting it and supercharging it. Mombelli creates a crescendo playing triplets over two 5ths and an octave. He plays through the changes, descending and using the D as a pedal point³⁰. To play

³⁰See Glossary for definition of pedal point.

this with two fingers (right hand) is incredibly difficult, and to do it with such control and timing is reserved for only the most technically capable in finger style. The end result of this line is an understated and impactful display of technical ability while being musically apt for this song. I do not think these motifs were planned or chosen beforehand. Mombelli intends his solos to sound like a melody (as part of the composition) and emphasises the power of repetition, but this has become an innate part of his playing through years of practice (Mombelli, 2019:26).

Mombelli is sometimes characterised by the darker, more experimental, and ‘abstract’ sounds in his music, a good example of which is the preceding work on *Happy/Sad*, “I Drank my Coffee and Dreamt” (1990). But in “My Friends” we see an early example of the lighter and the overtly beautiful side of his music-making. In the solo in particular he manages to pack in much raw emotion into a relatively short diatonic solo. He often says to his students: “I’m still just trying to write beautiful music in C major” (pers. comm.). This to me is a message to stay humble and always work at the fundamentals, which “My Friends” encapsulates.

A dedication to Mombelli’s sister, “Remember Lucia” (composed 1987, recorded 1990) is a solemn “semi bossa nova”, in which we witness the bassist’s approach to soloing over more challenging chords. The chart does not include a bass line, so I added the first cycles of the melody to my transcription. The same band line up as “My Friends and I” was used with the addition of Charlie Mariano on saxophone. Mombelli uses his favoured Ibanez fretless bass (Mombelli interview, 2024:61). Like many of his compositions “Remember Lucia” has an interesting harmonic structure. Mombelli often uses harmonic minor harmony, in this case F# harmonic minor (where the DΔb5/F# functions as a F#-Δb13 or F#-b13 with all its extensions). This shifts in bar 11: Mombelli descends chromatically from Bø to BbΔb5. Using the common tones between Bø and BbΔb5 to shift down (Levine, 1997:343). He then moving chromatically to AΔ#11, Abø and GΔb5, the same change as Bø to BbΔb5, and also uses the common tones. These are perhaps unusual changes, and it’s as if Mombelli is using half diminished chords in place of tritone substitution V chords (see Appendix 2).

The contrast of chord voicings between “My Friends and I” and “Remember Lucia” shows the growth and change in style over years of practice between 1983 and 1987 (Mombelli interview, 2024:59-61). Mombelli uses many slash chords in his compositions (Levine, 1997:310-311; Mombelli 2019). This comes from writing his music on the bass, and he found that playing chords ‘backwards’ with the 3rd on the bottom was more open than standard

voicings. This enables playing the E D and G strings together creating a greater distance between the lowest note (3rd) and the root and 5th above. In addition to his use of harmonic minor harmony he began frequently using Lydian chords such as AΔ#11 or BbΔb5 (Levine, 1997:289). These are some of the the fundamental harmonic components of Mombelli's sound.

The bass tone of his Ibanez fretless and the way he fingers the string leads each long note in the bass line to first crescendo and then diminish. When fingering the bass harder one actually reduces the amount of subs in one's tone. Playing softer by contract can make the bass louder in the mix as the transient higher frequencies are reduced, and the lower frequencies come through. Mombelli uses this phenomenon to create these crescendos playing harder and letting the notes ring out and get louder in the mix. This in combination with his uses of vibrato creates an ominous sound in the bass. This sound can be heard in Eberhard Weber's playing on his debut record *The Colours of Chloë* (1974), as well as on Mombelli's bass playing in "Remember Lucia".

At nearly two minutes (three cycles) the solo is long so I only outline its characteristics and focus on a specific moment of interest. Overall it is suitably more angular and disjointed than the solo in "My Friends". The use of triplets is quite frequent throughout the solo, usually in

Example 14.1. "Remember Lucia" by Carlo Mombelli (1993) bars 32-37. My transcription.

the form of scalar motion. Mombelli targets chord tones, playing mostly in intervals of thirds, fourths and using scalar motion, and employs slides, hammer ons, pull offs³¹, open strings, and trills throughout. On fretless one can more clearly hear his use of vibrato, while holding his long notes he incrementally (and in time) shifts his finger back and forth; although he

³¹ See Glossary for definitions of hammer-ons and pull-offs.

does this on the fretted instrument as well. Once again he aims for a vocal timbre to the tone. Most melodic ideas last between three and six bars and link to another idea. There are significant breaks between two beats and over a bar in length dividing these ideas, which function as deep breaths and get less frequent as the phrases get longer.

Mombelli begins melodically, starting in bar 32 by ascending F# natural minor starting on the 2nd (G#). This is contrasted by bar 35 where he highlights the F natural (#7) or major 3rd of the Db7b9/F. He has a similar line in the next cycle, in bars 48 to 52, this time starting the bar before and on D (b6), in semi-quavers, with a fast triplet in between B and D, and ends an octave up (F3).



Example 14.2. “Remember Lucia” by Carlo Mombelli (1993) bars 57-58. My transcription.

In bars 57 and 58 (see Example 14.2) he creates a haunting texture by playing with no right hand at all, hammering on and pulling off. Using demisemiquaver triplets to play around B Locrian, highlighting the chord tones. These kinds of winding left-hand lines would become a signature of Mombelli’s as can be heard on the album *Stories* (for example, on “In-Between I’ll Eat Dark Chocolate”, 2013).

He echoes the guitar in bars 59 and 61-62 incorporating and building on these two melodic ideas, and the immediacy of this response displays his musicality and attention to the ensemble (1991:1:56-2:02). In bar 62 he also adds a trill or strong vibrato to the long notes. In bar 60 he links these two with a combination of slides, first with a scalar descent and then ascending with an arpeggio.

After this he plays blues-orientated lines around an F# minor blues scale from bars 63 to 67, but in Mombelli’s typical free time, over the bar line style. Bar 70 builds on the phrase in bar 66, up a minor third over the same chord. Bars 71-74 is the peak of the solo both in terms of range and energy, and here Mombelli ascends in a Db Locrian mode, landing on the 3rd of Bø (D) as the chords shifts. He then highlights the flat 5, hitting his highest note (a G5) using it as a side down (Example 14.3).



Example 14.3. “Remember Lucia” by Carlo Mombelli (1993) bars 72-74. My transcription.

With these insights we can gain a better understanding of the fundamentals of Mombelli’s harmonic and textural approach, amongst other things. He targets emotive chord tones, reacts to the other musicians’ improvisations, builds ideas in series, plays the full range of the instrument, and ensures the overall structure builds and ‘peaks’ in a good place narratively. He also plays at constantly varying speeds, dragging and rushing, uses slides, trills, ghost notes, hammer ons, no left-hand (fingering), variations in both volume and in hardness of plucking. The solo in “Remember Lucia” is a series of ideas, an exploration from a younger Mombelli. The next solo I consider is a more contained narrative and perhaps a truer representation of his nature musical practice.

“Dancing in a Museum” (composed 1992, recorded 1993) is not a ballad like the previous two songs I discussed. It has similarly sombre undertones to “Remember Lucia” but is playful. Here Mombelli is on his fretted, Fender jazz bass. Released on his 1993 album of the same name, with the same line up of musicians it featured American Mick Goodrick on guitar (Carlo Mombelli Discography). Mombelli’s use of guitar (as opposed to for example the piano), particularly in his early recordings, gives him more frequencies to occupy, able to play chords and the full range of his instrument without obstruction from the range and density of piano voicings.

In the A section Mombelli plays a bass and chordal role simultaneously. The guitar and the saxophone play the relatively simple and repetitive melody. In the melody we can hear the influence of Mombelli’s years with Raiz de Pedra and his love for Brazilian music (Mombelli interview, 2024:62). The melody is based around a repeated enclosure on the 5th, landing on different descending notes starting on the 3rd and landing on the root. This lends it a Brazilian or Latin feel (Levine, 1997:461). But like the ‘semi bossa nova’ in “Remember Lucia” it is very much his own version. The harmonic structure is reasonably similar to a minor blues but with some key differences. The first is the length of the changes. Another key difference is that this song, and much of Mombelli’s music, uses harmonic minor harmony (1993: 0:00-

1:23). Beginning on Em9, Mombelli immediately creates tension by voicing the 9th and 3rd (10th) in the same register.

He then voice leads to a B7b9/E with no root (B) in the chord; another ‘tension’ which resolves as a cadence to Em without cadential root movement (V-i). He does the same movement in Am, but this time uses Adim (specifically playing the tritone) in anticipating the iiø-Vb9-i. Interestingly between the B7b9 (V) and the Em9 (i) he uses an FΔ#11 (Lydian) instead of a more conventional Fo. FΔ#11 shares common tones with Em9, so it is not jarring. With these ‘simple’ changes Mombelli plays with tension and release in an interesting way.

In a short (only two cycles) but impeccably crafted solo, Mombelli uses his characteristic subtlety with deceptively technical and precise musicianship. Often when discussing soloing he would tell me that the best improvisations sound like they are part of the melody.

Mombelli views composition and improvisation as essentially the same: he composes through improvising (instinctively) and improvises like he is composing (Mombelli, 2019:23-24).

Each idea and line in this solo links together, creating an extension of the composition. It gives a vivid sense of dancing around on the marble floors of an old museum.

The musical notation is presented in two staves of bass clef, 4/4 time, with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The first staff covers bars 48-52. It begins with a half rest, followed by a quarter note G2, a quarter note A2, a quarter note B2, and a quarter note C3. Above the staff, the chord Em9 is indicated. At bar 49, there is a half rest, followed by a quarter note D2, a quarter note E2, a quarter note F#2, and a quarter note G2. Above the staff, the chord B7b9/E is indicated. At bar 50, there is a half rest, followed by a quarter note A2, a quarter note B2, a quarter note C3, and a quarter note D3. Above the staff, the chord Em is indicated. The second staff covers bars 53-55. It begins with a half rest, followed by a quarter note E2, a quarter note F#2, a quarter note G2, and a quarter note A2. Above the staff, the chord Em9 is indicated. At bar 54, there is a half rest, followed by a quarter note B2, a quarter note C3, a quarter note D3, and a quarter note E3. Above the staff, the chord B7b9/E is indicated. At bar 55, there is a half rest, followed by a quarter note F#2, a quarter note G2, a quarter note A2, and a quarter note B2. Above the staff, the chord Em is indicated. The dynamic mp is indicated at the start of the first staff and at the end of the second staff.

Example 15.1. “Dancing in a Museum” by Carlo Mombelli (1993) bars 48-55. My transcription.

The solo builds slowly. His opening line (bb. 48-53) highlights the up beats and demisemiquavers between. The drums emphasise beat three with a snare hit and the guitar is playing beats one, two and three. So Mombelli meanders between their notes playing in E harmonic minor (Example 15.1). After a sliding phrase that lands on B in bar 54, he quotes the melody using it to highlight the change to Am by landing on A. He quotes the same phrase in bar 63, this time landing on G to highlight the chord change to Em. In between these two, in bars 58-60 he descends from B to E using an embellished version of the first three notes of the phrase (employing a ghost note to begin the phrase).

Example 15.2. “Dancing in a Museum” by Carlo Mombelli (1993) bars 63-72. My transcription.

Overall, the solo has a slinking, meandering quality, and bars 65-68 are a microcosm of this aesthetic. Mombelli ascends in E minor, descends from C to A, slides up to E, hits the open G and then the 12th fret G harmonic and then descends in E natural minor shifting to an E harmonic minor enclosure. This back and forth, and up and down melodic content is achieved using open strings to shift hand positions and create hammer ons. The affect is distinctive and satisfying. The listener is not sure where Mombelli is going but when he gets there it all makes sense.

From bar 70 to 72 yields the most staccato portion of the solo, beginning with two triplet arpeggios of C and B. The B (B7) arpeggio is played just before an Em chord, as a transition to Em. Landing on C Mombelli plays the b6 of Em (affirming the E harmonic minor scale), but also preparing the listener for the change to Am. He plays around Am with a final arpeggio on beat three and returns to ‘sliding around’ in bar 73, landing on C (the minor 3rd) in bar 74 (Example 15.3).



Example 15.3. “Dancing in a Museum” by Carlo Mombelli (1993) bars 73-79. My transcription.

The ending of the solo brings everything together. In bar 76 Mombelli slides into the b9 of F#ø (G) then plays between slides to the root and accented minor 3rd, using ghost notes to fill the space. And in bar 78 he highlights the 5th and 3rd of the B7b9. After holding back throughout the solo, and crafting a melodic story, he lets go: hitting a series of triplets and fast descending lines to cap off the solo which significantly raises the energy for Mariano’s solo to follow (Example 15.3).

This solo in “Dancing in a Museum” encapsulates Mombelli’s early style and development. Always a storyteller, he uses his solo as an extension of the composition, acting in service to the musical intention of the song (Mombelli, 2019:23-27). The hard years of work in South Africa, followed by risking it all in his move to Europe and dedication to his vision, led him to gain the respect of and play with many of his idols.

South African Bass Style(s)

It is important to remember that my analytical work is of these bass players’ early work, which I undertook in order to derive how and why their styles developed. Nor of course is this the whole picture of electric bass during this period – there are many bassists whose work I do not consider. This chapter is therefore one window into the development of the instrument’s usage in South Africa. It would be useful to understand what musical characteristics, in general, these bassists developed and sustained so we can better understand South African bass playing of the time and subsequently. It is not my intention to summarise the work of an entire generation of bass players nor to define a lineage. There is still

substantial research and analysis to be done in this regard, and I hope this chapter creates a basis for such work to continue.

There are many things to take away from the analytical work I've presented in this chapter. What strikes me is the variety of ways the bassists adapted to the influences at their disposal. The sample of musicians I studied is too diverse to describe a South African bass style, and one can conclude that the influences and diversity of music within South Africa means there can be no single South African bass style. But the sample does give insight into a variety and plurality of South African bass styles. As I described in the biographical chapter, what made the musicians successful were the completely different approaches to their careers, and this reflects in their musical approaches too. Their styles were also influenced by each other, sometimes directly: Kumalo was empowered by Gumede to continue to play fretless (Kumalo interview, 2024:10), Zulu was directly mentored by Kumalo (Zulu interview, 2024:20), and hearing Mbadu was a key moment of musical influence for Mombelli (Mombelli interview, 2024:58).

The similarities between their playing styles can be derived from the influences that they share. All were clearly drawn to and continued on the electric bass by the fusion, rock and musical developments of the time. All were influenced by local genres such as African jazz and *mbaqanga*; Mombelli the least so but these influences are audible in songs like "Me, the Mango Picker" (1993). The other prevalent influence was Latin music, both through local music similarities and connections and the globalisation of music (Thorpe, 2018:63). It was the diverse new waves of musics – fusion, afro-fusion, neo-traditional, afro-funk and ECM records – that captured the bassists' imaginations.

The combined legacy of these players was using the electric bass to more actively engage and interact with the music, drawing on the traditions of bass in South Africa and the new waves of music. By active engagement I mean, amongst other things, improvisation: bassists of this generation leave and take up 'space' when necessary in the band's texture, adding rhythmic variation, melodic interplay and extended soloing on the instrument. Before this generation, as seen in Joseph Makwela, the instrument occupied more of a functional 'back bone' to the music. The tradition of melodic interplay with lower voices, going all the way back to the choral music traditions in the country, left a door open to be explored (Coplan, 2007:34). The combination of this with jazz improvisation, fusion aesthetics and rhythmic and harmonic

interplay within local musics (such as *mbaqanga*, *marabi*, *kwela* and *ghoema*) led these bass players to create a more engaged playing style.

In terms of rhythmic features, there is a definite trend derived from *marabi* and *mbaqanga*, of targeting the upbeat in both bass lines and solos (Thorpe, 2018:60). I have discussed this feature in some detail in the practice of Gumede, Zulu and Kumalo. Their rhythmic feel tends to be more varied with a general tendency to push the beat and tempo. Gumede has a natural inclination to be ahead of the beat, Kumalo also plays slightly ahead of the beat but is also often on the beat, Zulu is most often on the beat. Mbadu's walking both pushes and pulls at the same time but is most comfortable when ahead of the beat, and Mombelli is even freer but I would argue that he is at his most comfortable behind the beat.

This overall tendency towards pushing the beat goes against some American jazz bass practice. In American jazz bassists are often encouraged rather to play the triplet behind the beat (Patitucci, 2021:9; Thorpe, 2018:25). The frequent use of anticipations is also a feature of South African bass playing (Thorpe, 2018:53). It could be in part caused by the high energy music of the time, but Joseph Makwela shares this tendency. The use of frequent slides is also a distinctive characteristic of South African bass playing, with other techniques like hammer ons, pull offs and harmonics used. Often they are deployed in order to emulate the human voice (Thorpe, 2018:69).

In their musical language Kumalo and Gumede are clearly more influenced by African jazz ('bebop') than American bebop (Davidson, 2012:27), with *mbaqanga* and fusion being an important foundation though their application of these influences is quite different.

Technique-wise Gumede was focused on finger-style using his six-string to push stylistic boundaries. He was also more influenced by Zulu musics like *Maskanda*. Kumalo's fretless style was informed by traditional Sotho musics and a Pan-African ethos. His frequently used techniques include pitch harmonics, slap and finger style.

Where Kumalo's fretless style focused on emulating or being influenced by traditional choral styles, Mbadu is probably the most open and schooled in the American jazz idiom yet still a modern master of local styles such as *ghoema* and *mbaqanga*. Zulu is something of a chameleon, able to play most styles and genres but to my ear most comfortable in afro-fusion and afro-funk. Mombelli's style I characterise as a South African interpretation of avant-garde European jazz with influences from Brazilian, American fusion and classical musics.

The approaches of these bassists is thus distinct. What they did as a group with other prominent bass players of the time was create a diverse palette of approaches to the instrument as well as the performance and creation of bass lines in South African musicking. Their combined musical legacy constitutes a significant contribution to the development of a musical language that took South African jazz and popular music in new directions. From Mbadu's and Mombelli's niche impact in the South African jazz and avant-garde worlds respectively, to Kumalo's, Zulu's and Gumede's mainstream success locally and overseas, these bass players built from the old and adapted the new to their unique visions of what the electric bass could be in and do for South African music.

Concluding Thoughts: Notes on the Album, *Lines*

For this research project I composed and recorded nine works. My intention was not to write exactly in the style of the bass players and artists who are the subject of this thesis, but rather to draw on features of their style, and therefore to participate in the South African bass tradition – to be part of the lineage. My aim in the compositions was to combine their sounds and ideas with more contemporary practices. The influence of my mentors Mbadu and Mombelli are so ingrained in my performance that I cannot avoid a certain bias towards them in my practice.

In an attempt to balance this I wrote a song dedicated to each bass player, taking direct influence from their work, and attempting to incorporate into my own practice the bass lines, playing styles and compositional elements of their music. Much of my subjects' music is instrumental and has long solo sections, so writing music in this style is also about providing a platform for others (and myself) to express themselves. Improvisation is an extension of composition in Mombelli's and other musicians' opinions (Mombelli, 2019:23-24), so how I have interpreted the improvisational techniques of each of these bass players is an additional point of emphasis.

In the spirit of their musical experimentation, I have also tried to extend my compositional and bass playing boundaries, focusing on creating something new that bears traces of the influence of some of the country's foremost bassists. This can particularly be seen in songs like "Peri Peri" and "Big Mak". Modern playing techniques such as double thumbing³², harmonics, pitch harmonics and triple fingering (right hand) are featured. Particularly my use of double thumbing in "The Guru (for Carlo)" and "Big Lion" is distinctive. Because of the control of pressure on the string it is no longer being used as a 'slapping' technique and is here a softer, more emotive technique. It is a technique I developed from many years of practice, taking modern bass techniques (originated by Victor Wooten, for example) and applying it to a Mombelli/ECM musical sensibility. Most of the compositions thus attempt to broaden my own artistic boundaries while participating in the South African bass lineage through incorporating aspects of my subjects' stylistic traits by which that lineage was created and sustained. In so doing I also honour my subjects and their work.

³² See Glossary for double thumbing definition.

Like Gumede's and Mahlangu's artistic relationship, the saxophone player Godfrey Mntambo and I have spent much of our early career working and composing together in our band The Kopano Jazz Collective. His role in this recording and in my general development and sound is integral – he is my significant other in learning (Smilde, 2010:86). I wouldn't compare Vusi Khumalo's and Bakhiti Kumalo's relationship to that of mine with drummers Enoch Marutha and Nicholas Bjorkman but they have both been important influences on my musical development and I have performed and recorded with them regularly for the past six years. We were all taught by Carlo Mombelli for our undergraduate music degrees at Wits University. Enoch has played for Khaya Mahlangu and Godfrey was mentored by him, so their relationship and knowledge of my subjects is also of benefit. Teboho Kobedi (keyboardist) and Frances Michaleto van der Walt (violinist) are the most recent additions to the band and appear on the album. Lastly the keyboardist and guitarist on "Lemon and Herb", respectively Josh Mokoena and Dylan Fine, have played with me for many years. Dylan Fine also performs on The Guru (for Carlo). Which musicians a composer and band leader trusts with their music and the musical relationships one establishes and develops over time are, in part, what contributes to a musician's growth. Trusting my fellow musicians to respect and interpret my intentions with this project was an important part of the creative process.

"Gumede"

"Gumede" is a direct tribute to Sipho Gumede's music and bass playing, mainly inspired by his early work with Spirits Rejoice and Sakhile. Originally written as a 6/8 groove, the 'Latin' feel was added as a result of experimentation during rehearsals. The chord changes and 'feels' are inspired by music on the album *Spirits Rejoice!*, particularly the pieces "Woza Uzo Kudanisa Nathi", "Spirits" and "Confusions" (1978): melodic minor harmony, pentatonics, a diminished scale, and 'jazz' chords with an overall fusion groove and instrumentation (envelope filter on bass and electric piano sound) are used. The bass leads the melody in the A and bridge sections (an idea taken from Gumede's later work) used here in a call and answer. The use of bass chords as seen in the C section is evident in some of Gumede's works (for example, in "Meeting Point") but the voicings are more influenced by Mbadu and Mombelli. In the solo I focused on emulating and taking on Gumede's melodic approach to developing idea in series, with interjections of 'exiting' fast lines and triplets. I use three fingers on my right hand to achieve this effect, which means I can create fast triplets on single notes. This solo, like Gumede's on "When days are dark friends are few", is also

around two minutes long. The melodic interplay between the bass and saxophone during his solo is also directly inspired by Sakhile's first album.

“Fleeting (for Spencer)”

I wrote “Fleeting” as a lament for Mbadu's passing in 2023. When playing together in our lessons he would play piano or drums and sing. This is represented here by the piano, drums and saxophone as his voice. He and Mike Perry would always encourage me to pursue my own compositional style and sound, letting me explore during our lessons with nudges in the right direction. This song is a continuation of that work. While it may not emulate his playing directly, it reflects my connection to him and his deep generosity which enabled others to achieve their musical potential. It is through composed with no solos. Like “The Guru (for Carlo)” free time is employed, which in combination with the extra beats (in bars 22 and 37) gives the feeling of floating and discombobulation that losing someone who means a lot to you creates. Mombelli's influence is also felt here in the chord voicings and general aesthetic. Mbadu loved Chick Corea, and we used to work on his music all the time. So, this song was also inspired by Corea's song “Windows” (1973), particularly how he uses space in the melody and the free role of the piano in the second repeat. One of the first times I was introduced to chordal playing on electric bass was when Mbadu taught me the A section to “Khanya” (1998), but that influence is better shown in the next song.

“Lemon and Herb”

This song was the first I wrote for this project. It takes direct inspiration from Mbadu's playing, particularly with Winston Mankunku on *Molo Africa* (1998) which, he told me, was where he was most able to be himself musically (Mbadu Interview, 2020). Like that album I attempted to balance the traditional with the modern in a high energy style in this piece. The drum beat for the A section is similar to “Let Go!” (1998). and as with “Let Go!” the B section opens up from a tighter, more groove-driven 6/8 sound to a 4/4 feel. The opening bass line emulates “Khanya” (1998) in its energy. Also from this song I drew on Mbadu's interactions with Mankunku in the solo section, using slap and varied textures and lines to complement the soloist. Throughout the album Mbadu plays staccato bass notes in the funkier A sections and long notes in the B section, the best examples being in “Peace Brothers Peace” and “Lagunya Khayelitsha (Zonke)” (1998). While not taking from *ghoema* and Mbadu's prestige as one of the best players in that genre, this song I think reflects the kind of music he liked to play best.

“Fana’s Jam”

This song was most influenced by Fana Zulu’s work with Moses Molelekwa. The steady groove of the A section reflects the bread and butter of Zulu’s playing with Bayete, Hugh Masekala and Jimmy Dlodlu. In the solo section I try to reflect his creativity and musicality, as seen for instance in “Mountain Shade”. The B and C sections put forth a more contemporary influence and are not dissimilar to Molelekwa’s sound. After I interviewed Vusi Khumalo and Zulu they both (separately) told me to transcribe “Mbombela” (1987) as an example of Zulu’s style. So “Fana’s Jam” was written with “Mbombela” in mind. That can mostly be seen in the A section and the call and answer nature of the bass line and melody.

“B.K.”

Bakhiti Kumalo’s work was in some ways the most difficult for me to present. Much of it is more pop orientated. As a result, I took most of the influence from his early work with Thetha and later work with Sankomota. In the bass line and sound I used slides and the fatter neck pick with enough crunch to approximate Kumalo’s Washburn sound. In the solo section I used harmonics, slaps, ghost notes and played expressively. The A section and solo section are directly influenced by his work. The bass line is specifically the ascending line that is repeated and shifted in the bridge from Thetha’s “I’m in Love” (1986). The overall style is more Afro-fusion (think Sakhile) than Thetha’s more pop-orientated sound. So this is a song for the young Kumalo, while he was playing with Kippie Moeketsi and Allen Kwela, and listening to Weather Report with Vusi Khumalo (Kumalo interview, 2024:4,8; Khumalo interview, 2024:43).

“The Guru (for Carlo)”

This piece is inspired by Mombelli’s oeuvre and overall style. The first album I heard of Mombelli’s was *Stories* (2013), and the use of cello and trombone on that album is what inspired the combination of violin and alto saxophone here. It is almost as if the higher register of the alto saxophone, tenor bass and violin are representative of my youth (higher pitched musical voice) in comparison to Mombelli’s more mature sound. When I arrived in Johannesburg to learn from Mombelli I had begun experimenting with the lighter double thumbing technique described above. One day I showed him the idea and he encouraged me to keep working on it and apply it to the songs I was studying, particularly the Bach Cello Suites. So, the A section of “The Guru” includes that technique. The B section is inspired by Mombelli’s “Remember Lucia” (1990), using common tones, slash chords and harmonic

minor harmony. The inclusion of guitar in the B section and its solo also harkens to Mombelli's early work particularly with Johnny Fourie. Finally, the bass outro/solo employs Mombelli's hammer on techniques (discussed in the analysis section) and applications of delay effects.

“Peri Peri”

“Peri Peri” is my attempt at a modern take on the wide array of influences I've discussed, using shifting meter, bass chords and melodic bass lines. Instead of endeavouring to emulate the genres the bassists worked in, in this piece I take specific ideas from the styles the bassists played and created (and which the thesis explores) and attempt to ‘update’ them. For instance, in the harmony and rhythm, the switching time signatures and grooves of Sakhile, Molelekwa and Mankunku is further expanded. The introduction uses what are commonly known as Coltrane changes; and South African jazz musicians were particularly influenced by hard bop (particularly John Coltrane and McCoy Tyner) (Makhathini, 2018:43). The B and C sections are characterised mostly by cadential harmony and semi-tone movements in the root. The introduction and A section is a 6/8 groove, but the feel is split into 7/8 and 5/8. The B section switches between 5/8 and 6/8. Part of my compositional practice has been using switching time signatures to create a sense of tension and release within the groove, using the melody as the anchor for the overall feel. The last sections of the song, the drum solo and C section, are in 5/8. So the song morphs constantly between different grooves. Melodically I use the angular melodic aesthetic of Mombelli's early work (“Remember Lucia” (1992), still flowing and musical but with an edge or tension to the sound. Composers that influenced this song outside of this study are Andile Yenana and Brad Mehldau, particularly their works “Thembisa-The People” (2002) and “Unrequited” (1998).

“Big Lion”

This is also a more ‘modern’ or updated take, this time on Mombelli's early sensibility as heard in “My Friends and I”. I attempted to compose something simple but beautiful. In addition to this, many of Gumede's techniques for creating bass-centric songs are employed. The song is dedicated to my father and Mombelli has also been a musical father to me. Like “My Friends and I” (1987) the song subtly switches keys centres. The progression was something I improvised while practising the double thumbing technique. The melody is the core line of that idea. Mombelli's ideas around composition and improvisation being different sides of the same coin are part of my compositional practice. The pianist has a free role

throughout the song. Like “Dancing in a Museum” (1993) the bass plays a chordal role, and I use a tenor bass; that is the top four strings of a six-string instrument on a four-string bass (tuned A D G C). This, with use of overdubbed (octaved) bass in the solo, is influenced by Gumede’s later work. He would use the range of his six-string to fill out his music and overdub a simple bass line. The song itself is like a march that builds slowly, repeating the same melodic idea. Like “Fleeting” this song is sentimental and connects to my personal journey in producing this work.

“Big Mak”

“Big Mak” takes the earlier music in this study of the 1970s – new *mbaqanga* and African jazz (of Joseph Makwela and Toni Sauli) – creating a new version of the pick-based bass tone with double thumbing and plucking. I used my 1974 Fender Jazz Bass for a more vintage (dark) sound. The A section is based around a I-IV-V (*mbaqanga*) progression and the B section VI-II-V-I is based on African jazz. The enclosures, stabs, arpeggios and largely diatonic melody is meant to give an ‘African bebop’ sensibility (Davidson, 2012:31). The bass improvisation in the solo section is inspired by Kumalo’s use of slap on “You Can Call Me Al” (1986), using it more as a rhythmic effect and with groove. The ending is an experiment in playing with multiple time signatures at the same time, creating a rhythmic tension and release.

Taken together, the compositions for this project were written to showcase what I have learnt during the many hours of researching the lives and music of seminal South African bassists, listening to and transcribing their work, and assimilating it into my compositional practice. I wanted to ‘update’ these traditions through the lens of someone born after this music was first created. My position is that of a student wanting to better understand the traditions that enable me to have a fulfilling music career. And so, I named the album *Lines*. This encompasses not only literal bass lines or melodic lines but also lines of thought, lineal paths of heritage (the bass lineage), and a responsibility to hold the line of musicianship and creativity inaugurated and sustained, and passed on, by previous generations of bass players.

Glossary

Genres

African Jazz: African jazz was originally marabi arranged for dance band instruments, developed in the 1930s as a result of rising interest in American jazz music (Coplan, 2007:157). The groove of this genre can be both a straight indlamu (Zulu) rhythm and swung (Thorpe, 2018:35).

Ghoema: Rooted in Cape Malay culture and originally played on the ghoema drum (made from a wine barrel and animal skin), this genre is a result of the mixture and creolisation of Malay, Nguni, and Afrikaans musics (Martin, 2007:351–353). The modern ghoema rhythm is based on the tumbao rhythm derived from ratiep (Sufi/Malaysian) music. Other musical influences include vaudeville and the harmonic progressions of marabi (Thorpe, 2018:60).

Kwela: Emerging in the 1950s, kwela is a penny whistle-based genre drawing its influence from marabi. Kwela can be broken down into two fundamental rhythmic groups: swung and straight. Using the cyclical I–I–IV–V progression, call and response, and traditional melodic structures, kwela exemplifies the general trend away from jazz and towards neo-traditional styles, which culminated in the 1960s with mbaqanga (Thorpe, 2018:33).

Marabi: Developed out of urban shebeens in the 1920s (Coplan, 2007:114), marabi is described by Ballantine as the South African equivalent to blues in American popular music, becoming the standard form for composition (1993:8). Todd Matshikiza described it as a set of “highly rhythmic repetitive single-themed dance tunes” (Matshikiza in Ballantine, 2012:32). The now-standard I–IV–V–I progression began in marabi mostly as triads using I–IV–I–V and developed into the iconic I–IV⁶–I^c–V⁷. The rhythmic elements include a straight feel and rhythms commonly found in Nguni music (Ballantine, 2012:34). Regarded as the foundation of South African jazz, marabi was the musical language that developed out of rapid and forced urbanisation (Thorpe, 2018:32).

Maskanda/Maskandi: A Zulu folk/acoustic tradition created by transposing and adapting Zulu gourd bow instruments (*ugubhu*, *umakhweyana*) and choral dance songs to guitar (Coplan, 2007:238). It appears to have originated as early as the 1800s (Coplan, 2007:237) but was popularised in the 1940s by two Ndebele singers, George Sibanda and Josaya Hadebe. Maskanda guitarists use their thumb on the lower strings to replicate the droning of two

fundamental pitches, while using the higher strings and their fingers to play the melody based on harmonic partials. This creates a call-and-response structure over faster rhythms such as *mzansi*, *isihameni*, and *isikhuze* (Coplan, 2007:238).

Mbaqanga: Originally in Zulu, *mbaqanga* refers to a type of traditional steamed maize bread. Coined by Michael Xaba of the Jazz Maniacs in the 1950s, the term is meant to evoke both the African origin and the sustenance of working-class urban people (i.e., maize bread). It blends traditional Zulu music, marabi and jazz (Coplan, 2007:200). Mbaqanga is viewed as a more commercially appealing style than African jazz. It is played over a straight quaver feel, with something of a Charleston, habanera, or ghoema rhythm typically played on the snare with brushes (Thorpe, 2018:36–37).

Mbube: The name mbube came from the popular song of the same name (meaning “lion” in English), written by Solomon Linda and recorded in 1939. It is a choral genre comprising low male vocals. It developed out of *ingoma busuku* (night music), an earlier form of Zulu choral singing, still performed today and now known as *isicathamiya* (Coplan, 2007:84–87).

Isicathamiya: Isicathamiya is the later, more polished version of Zulu choral singing, popularised by Ladysmith Black Mambazo. The name derives from the Zulu verb *cathama* meaning to walk softly or tread carefully, reflected in the smooth vocal delivery and choreography. It developed from *ingoma busuku* and *mbube* taking greater influence from Christian hymnody and American gospel quartets (Coplan, 2007:84-87)

Tsaba-Tsaba: Closely related to marabi, *tsaba-tsaba* emerged in the 1930s. It is characterised by a fast tempo and a driving quaver beat on the bass drum (Thorpe, 2018:32–33). It was popularised by the Jazz Maniacs and played by large dance orchestras (big bands) in dance halls. Accompanied by dancing ‘jive’ (the American jitterbug), *tsaba-tsaba* songs like *Tamatie Sous* met the demands of the working class and popularised the genre (Coplan, 2007:184).

Electric Bass Techniques, Tones, and Effects

Chorus effect: An audio effect that duplicates the signal, detunes, and delays it slightly, producing a shimmering, thicker, and layered tone.

Double picking: A picking technique for string instruments where the player alternates down and up strokes with a pick. This enables fast and consistent note repetition.

Double stop: Two notes played simultaneously on two different strings.

Double thumbing: A slap bass technique where the player alternates up and down strokes with their thumb, playing through the string.

Enclosure: A target note is approached by surrounding notes (above and below).

Fingerstyle: Playing a bass using the index and middle fingers instead of a pick.

Ghost notes: Muted notes played without fretting the string, used for rhythmic and percussive effects.

Hammer-ons: A legato technique where a finger of the fretting hand is used to strike the string, causing it to sound without picking. Often used to play fast passages.

Neck and bridge pickups: The neck pickup is placed closer to the neck of the bass, producing a warmer, rounder tone. The bridge pickup is closer to the bridge, creating a brighter tone with more audible harmonics.

Overdubs: Recordings made after the initial recording and added into the song.

Pedal point: A sustained or repeated note over which chords change.

Pull-offs: A technique where a fretting-hand finger pulls off the string, causing it to vibrate and produce a note without picking again. The opposite of a hammer-on.

Reverse delay: An audio effect where the delay is played in reverse, producing a swelling, backwards-sounding delay.

Slap: A technique where the bassist hits the string with the thumb and pops it by pulling it hard from underneath. This creates a percussive and punchy (high-transient) sound.

References

- Abel, Mark. 2014. *Groove: An Aesthetic of Measured Time*. Leiden: Koninklijke Brill.
- Ansell, Gwen. 2004. *Soweto Blues: Jazz and Popular Music in South Africa*. New York: Continuum International.
- _____. 2019. "The Malopoets: Mining the seam of people's music", *New Frame*, 11 February. <https://www.newframe.com/malopoets-mining-seam-peoples-music/>, accessed 25 March 2023.
- _____. 2021. "Remembering Pat Mokoka of the Malopoets – seminal South African music", *City Life / Arts*, 17 June. <https://citylifearts.co.za/remembering-pat-mokoka-of-the-malopoets-seminal-south-african-music/>, accessed 21 March 2023.
- _____. 2023. "Spencer Mbadu 1955-2023: The bass player's bass player". <https://sisgwenjazz.wordpress.com/2023/09/07/spencer-mbadu-1955-2023-the-bass-players-bass-player/>, accessed 12 January 2025.
- Allen, Laura. 2006. "From Rights to Responsibilities: Identity Politics and Ethnographic Methodology, Dialogues with South African Musicians", *Social Dynamics*. 32(2), 50-80.
- Ballantine, Christopher. 1991. "Music and Emancipation: The Social Role of Black Jazz and Vaudeville in South Africa between the 1920s and the Early 1940s", *Journal of Southern African Studies*. 17(1), 129-152.
- "Bakithi Kumalo epk" , accessed 10 May 2024.
- "Bakithi Kumalo Discography", <https://www.discogs.com/artist/328200-Bakithi-Kumalo>, accessed 10 May 2024.
- Beatty, Paul C., and Willis, Gordon B. 2007. "Research Synthesis: the Practice of Cognitive Interviewing", *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 71(2), 287–311.
- Bernstein, Jonathan, et al. 2020. "The 50 Greatest Bassists of all time", *Rolling Stone*, 2 July. <https://au.rollingstone.com/music/music-lists/50-greatest-bassists-of-all-time-13565/joseph-makwela-13573/>, accessed 1 July 2021.
- "Carlo Mombelli Discography", <https://www.discogs.com/artist/3958034-Carlo-Mombelli>, accessed 23 May 2024.
- Codell, Julie F. 2001. "Artists' Biographies and the Anxieties of National Culture". *Victoria Review*, 27(1), 1-35.
- Coolman, Todd. 1985. *The Bass Tradition: Past Present Future*. The University of California: Jamey Aebersold Jazz.
- Coplan, David B. 2007. *In Township Tonight: South Africa's Black City Music and Theatre*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- _____. 2001. "Sounds of the 'Third Way': Identity and the African Renaissance in Contemporary South African Popular Traditional Music". *Black Music Research Journal*, 21 (1), 107-124.

Cousins, David. 2021. "A Critical Edition of two of Bheki Mseleku's Albums: Transcribing *Celebration* and *Timelessness*". MMus. thesis, University of Witwatersrand.

Cowearer, Formosa. 2015. "Carlo Mombelli and Charlie Mariano's Happy Sad (1990) ITM". <https://billsbluenote.com/2017/01/16/carlo-mombelli-and-charlie-marianos-happy-sad-1990-itm-with-bill-elgart-and-peter-omara/>, accessed 20 November 2021.

Dalamba, Lindelwa. 2016. "A Sideman on the Frontlines: Gwigwi Mrwebi and South African Jazz History". *The World of Music*, 5(2), 67-89.

_____. 2021. "From Kippie to Kippies and Beyond: The village welcomes this child". <https://herri.org.za/7/lindelwa-dalamba/> accessed 21 October 2024.

_____. 2006. "Writing Against Exile: A Chronotopic Reading the Autobiography of Miriam Makeba, Joe Mogotsi and Hugh Masekela". MMus. thesis, University of KwaZulu-Natal.

D'Angelo, Micheal. 2021. "The Water is Wide: A Retrospective on the Drummers and Musical Style of ECM Records". PhD thesis, University of Colorado.

Davidson, Kevin. 2012. "Stylistic traits of South African jazz – Barney Rachabane: A case study". *SAMUS*, 32(1), 21-35.

Devroop, Chatradari and Chris Walton. 2007. *Unsung: South African Jazz Musicians under Apartheid*. Stellenbosch. Sun Press.

De Wet, Daniel. 2017. "Malcolm Braff's Approach to Rhythm for Improvisation: Definition, Analysis and Aesthetic". MMus thesis, University of Witwatersrand.

DiBartolo, Joel. 1997. *Serious Electric Bass*. Florida: Warner Brothers.

Doffman, Mark. 2009. "Feeling the groove: Shared time and its meanings for three jazz trios". PhD thesis, The Open University.

Döringer, Stephanie. 2021. "'The problem-centred expert interview'. Combining qualitative interviewing approaches for investigating implicit expert knowledge", *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 24(3), 265-278.

Douglas, Struan. 2015. *The Story of South African Jazz Vol. 1*. Afribeat.com Pbk.

_____. 2019. *The Story of South African Jazz Vol. 2*. Afribeat.com Pbk.

Dowdall, Peter. 2012. "The Impact of Technology on the Role and Function of the Bass in Jazz". PhD thesis, University of Adelaide.

Duby, Marc. 2013 "Reminiscing in Tempo': The Rainbow and Resistance in 1980s South Africa". *SAMUS: South African Music Studies*, 33, 83–104.

Eato, Johnathan. "South African Jazz and the Archive". <https://www.york.ac.uk/research/impact/jazz-cultures/>, accessed 17 July 2023.

Emielu, Austin. 2011. "Some theoretical perspectives on African popular music" *Popular Music*, 30(3), 371-388.

Farberman, Brad. 2021. "Paul Jackson, Headhunters Bassist Who Played With Herbie Hancock, Dies At 73". <https://www.npr.org/2021/03/19/978930638/paul-jackson-headhunters-bassist-who-played-with-herbie-hancock-dies-at-73>, accessed 29 July 2025

"Fana Zulu Discography". <https://www.discogs.com/artist/500797-Fana-Zulu>, accessed 10 May 2024.

Galane, Sello Edwin. 2009. "The Music of Philip Tabane – an Historical Analytical Study of Malombo Music of South Africa". PhD thesis, University of Pretoria.

Gamedze, Asher. 2018. "It's in the outsides: An investigation into the cosmological contexts of South African jazz". MA thesis, University of Cape Town.

Gerhart, Gail M. 1978. *Black Power in South Africa; The Evolution of an Ideology*. Berkeley CA: University of California Press.

Gracyk, Theodore A. 1992. "Adorno, Jazz, and the Aesthetics of Popular Music", *The Musical Quarterly*, 76(4), 526-542.

Johannes, Shaun. 2010. "Bassists of Ikapa (the Cape): A brief analysis of the development of the bass guitar in the musical genres of Mbaqanga and Khoema in Cape Town, South Africa with a focus on the biographies and techniques of two of Cape Town's most prolific bassists, Spencer Mbadu and Gary Kriel". MMus thesis, University of Cape Town.

"Joseph Makwela Discography". https://www.discogs.com/artist/923238-Joseph-Makwela?type=Credits&subtype=Instruments-Performance&filter_anv=0, accessed 1 November 2021.

Kaganof, Aryan. 2023. "An Interview with Don Laka", *herri*, 8. herri.org.za, accessed 21 March 2023.

Kernfeld, Barry, and Mark Tucker. [2002] 2016. "Transcription (ii)". *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, 2nd ed. Grove Music Online. Oxford University Press.

Khumalo, Vusi. Author's interview. Johannesburg, 29 March 2024.

Kumalo, Bakhiti. 2020. "Biography". <https://www.bakithikumalobass.com/biography.html>, accessed 15 November 2021

Kumalo, Bakithi. Author's interview. Johannesburg, 18 March 2024.

Koven, Michelle. 2014. "Practice, Ideology, Genre, and Intertextuality", *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 43, 499-520.

Larson, Steve. 1998. "Schenkerian Analysis of Modern Jazz: Questions about the Method". *Music Theory Spectrum*, 20(2), 209- 241.

Leach, Beth L. 2002. "Asking Questions: Techniques for Semistructured Interviews", *Political Science and Politics*, 35(4), 665- 668.

Ledwaba, Karabo. 2020. "Remembering Sipho Gumede: 'When I was young he used to braid my hair' - Mantombi". <https://www.sowetanlive.co.za/entertainment/2020-07-26-remembering-sipho-gumede-when-i-was-young-he-used-to-braid-my-hair-mantombi/>, accessed 20 May 2024.

Lilley, Andrew. 2020. *The Artistry of Bheki Mseleku*. Cape Town: African Minds.

Levine, Mark. 1995. *The Jazz Theory Book*. Petaluma: Sher Music.

"Luyande Madope chats to Fana Zulu". Jazzuary fm. <https://iono.fm/e/759283>, accessed 5 November 2021.

Madison, Guy, and George Sioros. 2014. "What musicians do to induce the sensation of groove in simple and complex melodies and how listeners perceive it". *Frontiers in Psychology*, 5, 1-14.

Mahlangu, Khaya. Author's interview. Johannesburg, 14 March 2024.

Makhatini, Ndudzo. 2018. "Encountering Bheki Mseleku: A Biographical-Analytical Consideration of his Life and Music". MMus. thesis, Stellenbosch University.

"Makhona Zonke Band Discography". <https://www.discogs.com/artist/1570042-Makhona-Zonke-Band>, accessed 20th May 2024

Martin, Denis-Constant. 2013. *Sounding the Cape: Music, Identity and Politics in South Africa*. Somerset West: African Minds.

Mbadu, Spencer. 2020. Author's Interview, 5 August 2020.

Michelson, Garret. 2014. "Groove Topics in Improvised Jazz". In *Analyzing the Music of Living Composers (and Others)*, eds. Jack Boss, Brad Osborn, Tim S. Pack and Stephen Rodgers. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 176-191.

Middleton, Richard. 1993. "Popular music analysis and musicology: bridging the gap". *Popular music*. 12(2), 177-190.

Moelwyn-Hughes, Ceri. 2013. "Women, Gender and Identity in Popular Music-Making in Gauteng, 1994 – 2012". MMus. thesis, University of the Witwatersrand.

Mojapelo, Max, ed. Galane, Sello. 2008. *Beyond Memory: Recording the History, Moments and Memories of South African Music*. Somerset West: African Minds.

Mombelli, Carlo. Author's interview. Johannesburg, 12 April 2024.

Mombelli, Carlo. 2019. *Mombelli's Intergalactic Bass Program, vol. 1 scales and arpeggio shapes, with finger placement for bass guitar plus jazz theory crash course*. Johannesburg: Real African Publishers.

_____. 2019. *Pulses in the Centre of Silence: Compositions, Scores and Artistry Concepts*. Johannesburg: Real African Publishers.

Monama, Billy. 2021. *Introduction To South African Guitar Styles, Volume 1 - Five Decades of Ukuvamba 1930s-1980s*. Johannesburg: Real African Publishers.

Monson, Ingrid. 1996. *Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Ngozi, Winston. 1998. *Molo Africa* (CD). Cape Town: Nkomo Records.

Naidoo, Leigh-Ann. 2015. "The Role of Radical Pedagogy in the South African Students Organisation and the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa". *Education as Change*, 19(2), 112-132.

Patitucci, John. 2021. *Walking Bass: How to Play Walking Basslines On Any Chord Sequence – For Upright & Electric Bass*. www.fundamental-changes.com.

Pekacz, Jolanta. 2004. "Memory, History and Meaning: Musical Biography and its Discontents", *Journal of Musicological Research*, 23(1), 39-80.

_____. 2006. *Musical Biography: Towards New Paradigms*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Perchard, Tom. 2007. "Writing Jazz Biography: Race, Research and Narrative Representation", *Popular Music History*, 2(2), 119-145.

Peretti, Burton W. 2001. "Speaking in the Groove: Oral History and Jazz", *The Journal of American History*, 88(2), 582-595.

Perry, Mike. 2020. Author's interview, 10 August 2020.

Pinheiro, Ricardo. 2023. "Past Present and Future Jazz: Scholarship, Historiography, Education and Performance", *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, 54(2), 297.

Porter, Lewis. 1988. "Some Problems in Jazz Research", *Black Music Research Journal*, 8(2), 195-206.

Potter, Gary. 1992. "Analysing Improvised Jazz", *College Music Symposium*, 32, 143-160.

Prouty, Kenneth E. 2006. "Orality, Literacy, and Mediating Musical Experience: Rethinking Oral Tradition in the Learning of Jazz Improvisation", *Popular Music and Society*, 29(3), 317-334.

Sabin, Robert. 2015. "Gary Peacock: Analysis of Progressive Double Bass 1963-1965". PhD dissertation, New York University.

"SAHistory Sipho Gumede". <https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/sipho-gumede>, accessed 10 November 2021.

Schroeder, Dave. 2011. "The Evolving Role of the Electric Bass in Jazz: History and Pedagogy". DMA dissertation, University of Miami.

Scott's Bass Lessons. 2024, May 9. 'Is this the most ICONIC bass break of ALL TIME'. https://youtu.be/kJjf-PNEa1k?si=_4nS5-AWzFnJenK1, accessed 10 May 2024.

Small, Christopher, 1998. *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*. Wesleyan University Press.

"Spencer Mbadu Discography". <https://www.discogs.com/artist/2133136-Spencer-Mbadu?superFilter=Instruments+%26+Performance>, accessed 1 June 2024.

Shepherd, Kyle. 2019. "Interrogating the Own: A Practice-based, Auto-ethnographic Reflection on Musical Creation with Reference to the Work of Abdullah Ibrahim, Zim Ngqawana and Kyle Shepherd". MMus. thesis, Stellenbosch University.

Shepherd, John. 1994. "Music, Culture and Interdisciplinarity: Reflections on Relationships". *Popular Music*, 13(2), 127-141.

"Sipho Gumede Discography". <https://www.discogs.com/artist/326685-Sipho-Gumede> accessed 20 May 2024.

"Sipho Gumede", 21 April 2023. <https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/sipho-gumede>, accessed 20 May 2024.

Smilde, Rineke. 2009. *Musicians as Lifelong Learners: Discovery through Biography*. Delft: Eburon Academic Publishers.

Stanyek, Jason. 2014. "Forum on Transcription". *Twentieth-Century Music*, 11(1), 101-161.

Tagg, Philip. 1982. "Analysing Popular Music: Theory, Method and Practice". *Popular Music*, 2, 37-67.

Thorpe, Christopher John. 2018. "Deconstructing 'the South African Jazz Feel': Roots, Rhythms and Features". MMus thesis, Rhodes University.

Tucker, Mark, and Barry Kernfeld. 2002. "Transcription (ii)". *Grove Music Online*, ed. Deane Root. Oxford University Press.

Turok, Ivan, et al. 2021. "Social Inequality and Spatial Segregation in Cape Town". In *Urban Socio-Economic Segregation and Income Inequality A Global Perspective: A Global Perspective*, eds. Van Ham, M; Tammaru, T; Ubarevičienė, R; Jansen, H. The Urban Book Series. 71-90.

Washington, Salim. 2013. "Exiles/Inxiles: Differing axes of South African jazz during late Apartheid", *South African Music Studies (SAMUS)*, 32, 91-109.

Wiley, C. 2010. "Biography and the New Musicology", Paper presented at the (Auto)Biography as a Musicological Discourse the Ninth International Conference of The Departments of Musicology and Ethnomusicology, Faculty of Music, 19 - 22 April 2008, Belgrade, Serbia.

Willink, Katie G., and Shukri, Salma T. 2018. "Performative interviewing: affective attunement and reflective affective analysis in interviewing", *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 38(4). 187–207.

Zulu, Fana. Author's interview. Johannesburg, 7 March 2024.

Discography

- Abstractions. 1988. *On The Other Side*. Shifty Records (2) SHIFT 20
- Bayete. 1987 'Mbombela'. *Mbombela*. Flame (V) 4061531.
- Clarke, Stanley. 1976. *School Days*. Nemperor Records NE 439.
- Corea, Chick. 1973. 'Windows' Inner Space. Atlantic SD 2-305.
- Dludlu, Jimmy. 1997. *Echoes From The Past*. PolyGram South Africa CDRBL 253.
- Dludlu, Jimmy. 2001. *Afrocentric*. Universal Music CDRBL 285.
- Dludlu, Jimmy. 2005 *Corners of My Soul*. Universal Music CDSRBL 342.
- Galena, Hotep Idris. 1990. *Heading Home*. The Sun AE 7862.
- Gumede, Sipho. 1985. *Faces and Places*. Vuka Africa VUB 7001.
- Gumede, Sipho. 1986. *We Know Who We Are*. Gallo HUL 40111.
- Gumede, Sipho. 1988. *Village Dance*. Gallo GRC HUL 40151.
- Gumede, Sipho. 1990. *Thank You For Listening*. African Echoes AE 7863.
- Gumede, Sipho. 1991. *Banana City Jive*. Kalamazoo KMH 1004.
- Gumede, Sipho. 1994. *Down Freedom Avenue*. M.E.L.T. 2000 BWSA051.
- Gumede, Sipho. 1996. *Ubuntu – Humanity*. B&W Music BW084.
- Gumede, Sipho. 1998. 'When Days are Dark Friends are Few' Blues For My Mother. Sheer Sound SSCD 039.
- Ibraihim, Abdulah (Dollar Brand). 1975. *African herbs*. The Sun SRK 786135.
- Ibraihim, Abdulah (Dollar Brand). 1974. *Mannenberg ~ 'Is Where It's Happening'*. The Sun SRK 786134.
- Ibrahim, Abdulah (Dollar Brand). 1979. *Underground in Africa*. The Sun SRK 786143.
- Ibrahim, Abdulah. 1991. *Mantra Mode*. African Echoes AE 7867.
- Jackson, Micheal. 1972. *Ben*. Motown M755L.
- Mahlangu, Khaya. 1985. *To You, My Dear*. Priority Records PRYB 4005.
- Mahotella Queens. 1971. *Uyavutha Umlilo*. Gumba Gumba MGG.560
- Makhona Zonke Band. 1975. 'Emazenkeni'. *S'Puku Mathambo No.2*. Inkonkoni NKO. 157.
- Mankunku, Winston and Perry, Mike. 1997. *Dudula*. Nkomo Records NK 007.
- Mankunku, Winston and Perry, Mike. 1998. *Molo Africa*. Nkomo Records NK 0010.
- Masekela, Hugh. 1989. *Uptownship*. Novus PL83070.
- Masekela, Hugh. 1999. *Sixty*. Columbia COL 495227.
- Matrix. 1979. *Tale of the Whale*. Warner Bros. Records BSK 3360.
- Metheny, Pat. 1976. *Bright Size Life*. ECM Records ECM 1073.
- Mombelli, Carlo. 1993. *Dancing in a Museum*. ITM Pacific 970078
- Mombelli, Carlo and Charlie Mariano. 1990. *Happy/Sad*. ITM Pacific 970057.
- Mombelli, Carlo. 2022. *Lullaby For Planet Earth*. CYH Records CYH 0003.
- Mombelli, Carlo. 2014. "In Between I'll Eat Dark Chocolate" *Stories*. Instinct Africaine INSO19
- Molelekwa, Moses. 1994. *Finding Ones Self*. B&W Music BW053.
- Pastorius, Jaco. 1976. "Portrait of Tracy" *Jaco Pastorius*. Epic ELPS 3815.
- Raiz De Pedra. 1996. *Diário De Bordo*. Tiptoe TIP 8888222
- Sakhile. 1982. *Sakhile*. Moonshine (4) Shine 3503.

Sakhile. 1983. *New Life*. Vuka Africa VUG 4001.

Sankomota. 1991. "Papa". *The Writing Is On The Wall*. Flame (V) 4064631.

Spirits Rejoice. 1977. *African Spaces*. Atlantic ATH 4010.

Spirits Rejoice. 1978. *Spirits Rejoice!*. Jo' Burg TJC 13029.

Simon, Paul. 1970 "Bridge over trouble". *Bridge Over Troubled Water*. Columbia -KCS 9914.

Simon, Paul. 1985 'You Can Call Me Al'. *Graceland*. Warner Bros. Records 925447.

Tabane, Phillip. 1996. *Ke a Bereka*. Kariba Records TUCD44.

The Drive. 1975. 'Spiritual Prayer'. *Unlimited*. RCA Victor RCL 1200.

Thetha. 1986. *Dark Streets, Bad Night*. Flame (13) FLAME(E) 4051551.

Various. 1993. *Basstorius*. Hot Wire Records HOT 9008 C

Weather Report. 1977. "Teen Town" *Heavy Weather*. Columbia PC 34418.

Weber, Eberhard. 1974. *The Colours Of Chloë*. ECM Records ECM 1042.

Yenana, Andile. 2002. 'Tembisa' *We Used to Dance*. Sheer Sound SSCD 080.

Zollsound 4 feat. Konitz, Lee. *Open Hearts*. Enja Records CD 91232.