

PLAYING THE CHANGES

**HOW DARIUS AND CATHY BRUBECK CREATED A JAZZ PROGRAM IN A
SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITY**





Wednesday 3 April - Saturday 6 April

MY CONNECTION WITH THE BRUBECKS – CHANCE ENCOUNTERS

- **A BIG DAVE BRUBECK FAN WHEN GROWING UP**
- **ATTENDING JAZZ RESEARCH CONFERENCES AT WHICH DARIUS AND CATHY WERE SPEAKING, AND BUYING THEIR BOOK**



MY CONNECTION WITH SOUTH AFRICAN JAZZ – MORE CHANCE ENCOUNTERS

IN A JAZZ EDUCATION CONTEXT:

- **WORKING WITH DAVE DEFRIES, FORMER MEMBER OF THE BROTHERHOOD OF BREATH (CHRIS MCGREGOR)**
- **WORKING WITH VISITING MUSICIANS FROM SOWETO**

IN A PERFORMING CONTEXT:

- **PLAYING WITH MELVIN PETERS, FORMER MEMBER OF THE JAZZANIANS**





FULL CIRCLE – IT'S A SMALL WORLD

THE DARIUS BRUBECK QUARTET PERFORMED AT THE LIVERPOOL INTERNATIONAL JAZZ FESTIVAL IN FEBRUARY 2024. THE DOCUMENTARY FILM LINKED TO THE BOOK (DIR. TEN KEIJI, 2023) WAS SCREENED, FOLLOWED BY A Q&A WITH THE BRUBECKS AND THE FILM PRODUCTION TEAM. THE BRUBECKS ALSO GAVE A TALK TO MY MUSIC STUDENTS. IT WAS AN HONOR TO INVITE THEM TO OUR FESTIVAL!

PLAYING THE CHANGES

JAZZ AT AN
AFRICAN UNIVERSITY
AND ON THE ROAD



DARIUS BRUBECK AND CATHERINE BRUBECK

THE BOOK (BRUBECK & BRUBECK, 2024)

WHAT IT IS NOT:

- A HOW-TO MANUAL FOR JAZZ EDUCATORS
- AN ACADEMIC TEXT
- AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

IT CAN BE CONSIDERED AS A CASE STUDY OF HOW JAZZ EDUCATION CAN BE GENUINELY INCLUSIVE, PROGRESSIVE, AND POLITICALLY AND CULTURALLY SIGNIFICANT BEYOND THE UNIVERSITY

DARIUS AND JAZZ IN SOUTH AFRICA

- **FOR DARIUS, HIS EYE-OPENING FIRST TRIP TO SOUTH AFRICA AS A MEMBER OF THE NEW BRUBECK QUARTET IN 1976 WAS “THE START OF MY LONG ASSOCIATION WITH THE SOUTH AFRICAN JAZZ SCENE” (P. 9)**
- **THERE ARE PARALLELS WITH DAVE BRUBECK’S EXPERIENCES WHEN TOURING SOUTHERN PARTS OF THE US IN THE 1950S WITH EUGENE WRIGHT (SEE CLARK, 2021)**



BEING A BRUBECK IN SOUTH AFRICA

- **WITHOUT CATHY (WHO GREW UP IN SOUTH AFRICA) IT WOULD HAVE BEEN DIFFICULT, IF NOT IMPOSSIBLE, FOR DARIUS TO ACHIEVE WHAT HE ACHIEVED**
- **BEING A BRUBECK WAS USEFUL: ON FIRST ARRIVING IN DURBAN, CATHY RECALLS “IT SEEMED THAT EVERYONE WANTED A BIT OF THE BRUBECK LUSTER” (P. 21)**
- **DAVE AND IOLA BRUBECK WERE LATER INSTRUMENTAL IN MAKING POSSIBLE A SOUTH AFRICAN STUDENTS’ TRIP TO THE US**

THE STRUGGLE

- **THE BRUBECKS WENT TO SOUTH AFRICA FOLLOWING THE APPOINTMENT OF DARIUS AS A “MUSIC THEORY” TEACHER AT DURBAN UNIVERSITY, DURING THE APARTHEID ERA**
- **DARIUS BECAME HEAVILY INVOLVED WITH ANTI-APARTHEID PROTEST MOVEMENTS AND CATHY WAS ALREADY A SEASONED POLITICAL ACTIVIST – DESPITE THE DANGERS, CATHY EXPLAINS: “[EXILES] TOLD US THAT THE TIME HAD COME FOR TRANSFORMING INSTITUTIONS FROM WITHIN. JAZZ, AFTER ALL, WAS ON THE SIDE OF THE STRUGGLE AND WE COULD HELP WITH THE STRUGGLE FOR JAZZ” (P. 14)**

A DIFFICULT START

NO SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES HAD JAZZ PROGRAMS BEFORE THE BRUBECKS ARRIVED, AND DARIUS WAS REPORTED TO BE THE FIRST PROFESSIONAL JAZZ MUSICIAN TO BE APPOINTED TO A SOUTH AFRICAN MUSIC DEPARTMENT. WITH REFRESHING HONESTY, HE ADMITS “I WAS NOT AN EXPERIENCED TEACHER, NOR HAD I GRADUATED FROM A TOP-RATED JAZZ PROGRAM SUCH AS NORTH TEXAS STATE OR BERKLEE COLLEGE OF MUSIC” (PP. 12-13). INDEED, ONE STUDENT HAD TOLD DARIUS “THAT I ‘WASN’T QUALIFIED’, ‘JUST THE SON OF A FAMOUS MAN’” (P. 28), AND SOME OF THE EXISTING MUSIC FACULTY WERE INITIALLY UNCONVINCED OF THE VALUE OF JAZZ EDUCATION, THAT “ADMITTING JAZZ STUDENTS WOULD LOWER ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND ONE PERSON ... ACTUALLY SAID THAT ‘JAZZ WOULD RUIN THE PIANOS’” (P. 68).



FINDING JAZZ STUDENTS

THE BRUBECKS INITIALLY HAD DIFFICULTY RECRUITING JAZZ STUDENTS, BUT THROUGH CREATIVITY AND SHEER HARD WORK MANAGED TO FIND ENOUGH STUDENTS TO RUN THE PROGRAM. TO PROVIDE EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY FOR THOSE STUDENTS UNABLE TO AFFORD TO STUDY, THE BRUBECKS WENT AS FAR AS PROVIDING ACCOMMODATION IN THEIR OWN HOME. THEY ALSO WENT ON TO ESTABLISH A CAMPUS JAZZ CLUB TO PROVIDE A SOCIAL HUB AND GIGGING VENUE FOR STUDENTS AND LOCAL MUSICIANS.

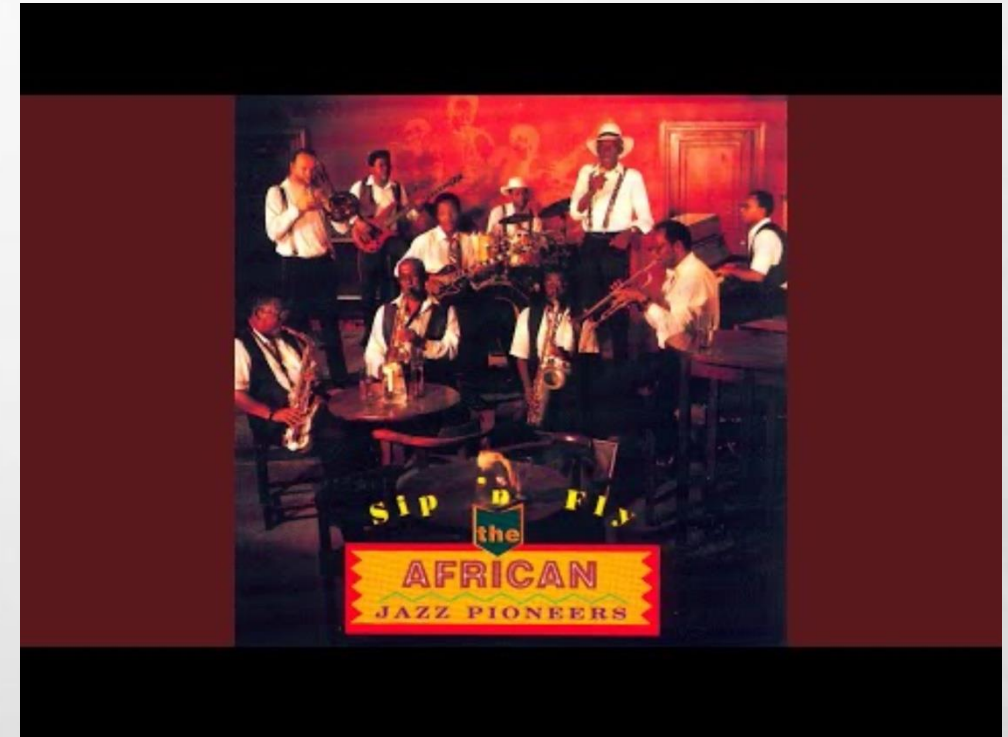


THE JAZZANIANS

- **THIS WAS A STUDENT BAND (INCLUDING PIANIST MELVIN PETERS) THAT HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO TOUR INTERNATIONALLY AND RECORD, AND THE ALBUM *WE HAVE WAITED TOO LONG* HAS BEEN RE-RELEASED ON CD AND VINYL**
- **THANKS TO DAVE AND IOLA BRUBECK THEY WERE ABLE TO PERFORM AT THE 1988 NAJE CONFERENCE IN DETROIT**

SOUTH AFRICAN JAZZ

WHILE THERE ARE VARIOUS STYLES OF SOUTH AFRICAN JAZZ, POPULAR ELEMENTS SUCH AS DANCEABLE GROOVES AND DIATONIC, CYCLIC CHORD SEQUENCES (USED IN MARABI MUSIC) HAVE BEEN WIDELY UTILIZED BY GROUPS SUCH AS THE AFRICAN JAZZ PIONEERS, WHO INCORPORATE AN INFLUENCE OF BIG BAND SWING AS WELL



IMPROVISING EDUCATION

THE JAZZ STUDENTS CAME FROM A RANGE OF BACKGROUNDS AND MUSICAL EXPERIENCE, SO THE CURRICULUM HAD TO CATER FOR ALL, AS DARIUS EXPLAINS: “FOR THE FOUR-YEAR JAZZ DEGREE, WE STARTED WITH A GENERIC MUSIC TEMPLATE WITH A CORE CURRICULUM OF MUSIC CULTURE AND HISTORY, MUSIC THEORY, AURAL PERCEPTION (EAR TRAINING), PRACTICAL STUDIES, JAZZ WORKSHOP FOR TWO YEARS, FOLLOWED BY JAZZ PERFORMANCE FOR THOSE IN SENIOR YEARS” (P. 73). IN ADDITION, JAZZ HISTORY BECAME PART OF THE GENERAL CURRICULUM FOR ALL STUDENTS, MAKING IT A “LEVELER” FOR JAZZ STUDENTS AND OPENING “NEW PATHWAYS TO UNDERSTANDING ALL KINDS OF CONTEMPORARY MUSIC AND DIDN’T DIVIDE MUSIC INTO ‘SERIOUS’ AND ‘LIGHT’” (P. 75).

A large jazz band is performing on a stage. The band consists of many musicians, including saxophonists, trumpeters, a pianist, a keyboardist, and a drummer. They are all dressed in dark clothing. The stage is lit with warm, golden light, and there are some plants and musical equipment visible in the background. The overall atmosphere is professional and focused.

CONNECTING WITH COMMUNITY

AFTER ARRIVING IN DURBAN DARIUS WANTED TO FORM A BIG BAND, BUT WITHOUT ENOUGH JAZZ STUDENTS TO FILL ALL THE CHAIRS HE HAD TO PERSUADE THE UNIVERSITY MANAGEMENT TO ALLOW MUSICIANS FROM OUTSIDE THE CAMPUS TO JOIN. AS DARIUS ARGUES, “THIS WAS THE BEST WAY TO IMPROVE MUSICIANSHIP, READING AND PRECISION, GET INSTRUMENT-SPECIFIC, INFORMAL BUT IMPORTANT TIPS FROM MORE ADVANCED PLAYERS, WHILE LEARNING THE REPERTOIRE AND UNWRITTEN CONVENTIONS, RANGING FROM JAZZ PHRASING TO REHEARSAL ETIQUETTE” (P. 40). THIS IS A PARTICULAR INTEREST OF MINE, ABOUT WHICH I HAVE WRITTEN (SYKES, 2023).

OTHER POINTS TO CONSIDER

Cathy's role in assisting Darius should not be underestimated. Even though she had no official status in the music department and was not even paid to begin with, without her the venture would simply not have been possible.

Darius had to grapple with the UN cultural boycott of South Africa, acknowledging South African artists' moral "dilemma of fighting apartheid through music while being politically aligned to the cultural boycott advocates who would stop them doing so" (p. 41). He saw both sides of the argument and was perhaps less naïve about it than musicians such as Paul Simon (in his album *Graceland*, 1986).

Darius refers to "glocalization" to describe the way in which jazz evolves by naturally integrating (rather than "appropriating") stylistic features of a local culture. This is a topic often debated in jazz studies, particularly when discussing jazz outside the US.

CONCLUSION AND RELEVANCE FOR TODAY

- **THE STORY OF THE BRUBECKS' TIME IN SOUTH AFRICA IS AN UPLIFTING ONE, SHOWING WHAT CAN BE ACHIEVED IN WHAT WERE OFTEN VERY CHALLENGING CIRCUMSTANCES – THOUGH THE WAY IN WHICH JAZZ BRINGS PEOPLE TOGETHER IS REFLECTED IN THE WAY THE BRUBECKS OFTEN MAKE LIGHT OF WHAT SEEM TO BE DANGEROUS SITUATIONS!**
- **THE VALUE OF JAZZ EDUCATION CAN BE SO MUCH MORE THAN SIMPLY TEACHING AND LEARNING JAZZ. DARIUS REALIZES THAT IN THE PRESENT TROUBLED TIMES, “STARTING A JAZZ COURSE AT A UNIVERSITY DOESN'T SEEM SUCH AN EXISTENTIAL ISSUE. NEVERTHELESS, AT THAT TIME AND IN THAT PLACE, IT WAS A WORTHY CAUSE AND TRANSFORMATIONAL FOR BOTH STUDENTS AND PUBLIC PLATFORMS BEYOND THE CAMPUS” (P. 66).**

FURTHER READING

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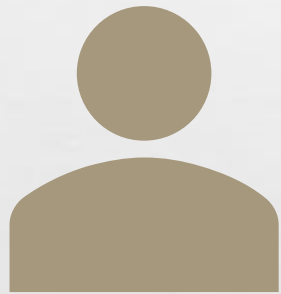
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COMMENTS OR QUESTIONS?



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