

Chapter 7: Historical traces of the biased profiling of jazz in South Africa

CHAPTER SEVEN

Historical traces of the biased profiling of jazz in South Africa

7.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to investigate when jazz actually came to be vigorously promoted as a more important part of the South African music landscape. This chapter is about the development of modern popular music in black South Africa. It establishes the intellectual orientation prevalent in the popular imagination of black population – exogenous (Afro-American) imagination of self. Tabane was an exception, and emerged as an original thinker who resolutely distanced himself from being labelled a jazz oriented musician. The role of John Mehegan, an American, who visited South Africa to promote jazz as the ideal creative aspiration for black musicians, is particularly examined in this chapter. This focus is important for the research because Philip Tabane’s creation of popular music of Malombo has had to fight for space with the new fashion of jazz. Most critical is that from that day when jazz was purposefully promoted in South Africa to date, the focus shifted considerably from indigenous music.

7.1.1 The development of popular music in South Africa

In the 1920s *marabi* was played only on piano with accompaniment from pebble cans. Still in 1920s, African Gospel was sung *a capella*. African Jazz and Jive was a fusion of *marabi* and swing. In 1939 *mbube* was *a capella*. Solomon Linda (Wikipedia, 2008), who sang *mbube*, produced probably the first album to sell more than 100,000 copies in history. In 1948 Dolly Rathebe became the first female jazz star to be in the first African feature film, thereby introducing the female voice to the then male dominated vocal sound. The 1950s South African jazz was characterised by swing, especially Johannesburg which boasted of stars like Alison Temba, Elijah Nkanyane, Ntemi Piliso, Wilson Silgee and Isaac Nkosi. Mirriam Makeba, Dorothy Masuka from Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, the Manhattan

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Brothers, and the African Inkspots, trailed behind Dolly Rathebe's leadership of the contemporary sound of the time. In the 1960s, the dominant style was *mbaqanga* – the term coined by a Jazz saxophonist William Xaba to refer to 'dumpling' or 'home made' sound.

Wikipedia (2008) sketches the scenario of the music scene in South Africa at the time:

Mbaqanga used saxophone epitomised by William Xaba himself and later West Nkosi, bass epitomised by the likes of Joseph Makwela, guitar epitomised by Marks Mankwane, and Vivian Ngubane, drums epitomised by Lucky Monama, vocals were harmonies epitomised by the Skylarks and the Manhattan Brothers using five part harmony, and the Dark City Sisters were the sweetest vocal harmony epitomes of vocal harmonies of *mbaqanga* – a combination of kwela, *marabi*, and American jazz vocal harmonies. Jack Lerole of the Black Mambazo fame together with Simon Mahlathini Nkabinde added the 'groaning male voice' to the *mbaqanga* sound of the 60s. The Skylarks and the Manhattan Brothers had copied the American vocal bands which however used four part harmony. In the same decade of *mabqanga*, Willard Cele's pennywhistle was the signature of the contemporary sound until Spokes Mashiane with his "Ace Blues" became the biggest signature of pennywhistle. But he became popular in the *kwela* feel of *mbaqanga*. Therefore the 1960 *mbaqanga* co-existed with *kwela* and the result was *mqashio*.

Wikipedia (2008) further documents that in the sixties, when America experienced the rise of soul music, South African Jazz split into two fields: Jazz jive and *avante-garde* jazz. The former was epitomised by Elite Swing Stars, while the latter was epitomised by Hugh Masekela, Dollar Brand, Kippie Moeketsi, Jonas Gwangwa, Gideon Nxumalo and Chris McGregor.

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7.1.2 John Mehegen records the first two jazz LPs in South Africa, 1959

Some of the early writings on the profiling of Jazz in South Africa is Gideon Jay's article 'Pick of the disks off the record' Johannesburg, (*Zonk*, February 1955, 45)

Gideo puts it:

Round about the year 1948 the indigenous jazz idiom was born and we looked around for a tag...a name which would describe this form of music adequately and yet avoid the confusion of overseas influence. We called it African Jazz.

The other account of the rebirth of Jazz in South Africa is told by Todd Matshikiza. Matshikiza, *Drum* August 1957, in reference to a tour with the Harlem Swingsters, late 40s, reminisces over the rebirth of African Jazz in South Africa. He says:

African jazz was reborn. The original product -- marabi -- had died when American swing took over. We recaptured the wonderful mood over an elevating early breakfast of corn bread and black tea in the open air after a bout of heavy drinking the previous evening. Gray [Mbau] put the corn bread aside and started blowing something on the five tone scale. We dropped our corn bread and got stuck into Gray's mood...We syncopated and displaced accents and gave endless variety to our 'native' rhythms. We were longing for the days of marabi piano, vital and live...It was Tebejane's original material, but treated freshly with a dash of lime.

The research makes an observation that little is known about, amongst the jazz appreciation societies today, that Mehegen, an American who visited South Africa to promote jazz as the ideal creative aspiration for black musicians,

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recorded the first two African jazz LPs in South Africa. Evidence of this is captured in the article by Todd Matshikiza (1961):

American pianist John Mehegen came to South Africa to play a short season in the plush white clubs. He heard some of our fellows blow, and decided he would like to record with them. "You guys ready?" The session is on.

Matshikiza was himself one of those musicians who were the first to be affirmed as jazz musicians by Mehegen. He bought into the idea of jazz, and never looked back. Matshikiza was so taken by the style of jazz that he tried to find answers in history if he and his generation would not have naturally created jazz as young boys. He believes they almost did. He does not suspect that they would have come up with some more profound music style than jazz. This is what Mtshikiza (1948) had to say:

What our players learnt from the JAZZ PROF

By Todd Matshikiza

It seems like yesterday since we last played the kazoo. Yet we played it as far back as 1929. You bought it for a sixpence, or you stretched a piece of tissue paper across a comb, and blew.

The kazoo was a magnificent instrument. So simple any child could play it. So loud you could feel any hall with sound. So versatile, you could get any sound out of it. It was an entertaining invention that required no skill.

Later we added the guitar to the sound of the kazoo. Here too, we were looking for simple sounds. We were looking for Jazz. Later we fumble along for all kinds of instruments, fiddling away to find jazz. Perhaps the

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man that got nearest to that in those days was Tebejane. He very nearly discovered jazz, even then.

But since those early days, we have discovered that there is much more to jazz than fumbling and fiddling away at simple musical sounds. We discovered that we have to learn the simple steps, study hard, adding all the musical time to our natural musical gifts.

The original article is provided in *Plate 7.1* as empirical evidence that Matshikiza did in fact make the case he makes. He strongly believes that the pursuit of playing an instrument like the kazoo and jazz as early as 1929, was to look for jazz. Matshikiza does not realise that as children, experimenting with different instruments is virtuous. It is the most creative thing young people could do. Africa made music like all children of other nations of the world. One wonders what propelled the young Matshikiza and his peers to 'look for jazz'.

The researcher argues that if it were not for Mehegen, they could have most probably discovered some great sound peculiarly crafted in South Africa. The researcher further suspects that perhaps they had crafted some innovative work, but were looking somewhere else for affirmation. If what they experimented before they met Mehegen was recorded, and were to be found, the tapes would certainly make interesting revelations of their 'stumbling and fiddling' on the kazoo and the guitar. The researcher strongly believes that something profound was developing then. At least the research is reliably informed that they made 'simple musical sounds'. The researcher argues that simplicity is the hallmark of great creativity. Much against Matshikiza's belief, the researcher makes bold to say that learning the simple steps, studying hard, adding all the musical time to our natural musical gifts, is all they had done before Mehegen came to South Africa. If learning 'basic steps' refers to scales and instrument discipline,

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‘studying hard’ refers to studying Western music theory, and ‘adding musical time to our natural gifts’ meant adding time signatures to the African music they made, then the researcher has every reason to believe that Mehegen achieved one simple thing with Matshikiza, and that is instilling inferiority complex and self doubt. In most cases, a feeling such as this destroys creativity in people.

On the contrary, Tabane avoided at all cost, to be made to feel inadequate. He stayed at home, and taught himself the basic steps of how ‘he’ would navigate his way around the guitar. He developed a personalised ‘discipline’ and fingering position on the fret board to produce what he felt. The result was a style that played base lines on the top E string while playing melody motifs on the other strings. That self developed discipline, was born of the same personal circumstances that made Wes Montgomery use his thumb to produce a rich tone on his guitar, a tone that gave birth to bebop. It was the same personal circumstances that made John Coltrane to develop circular breathing technique resulting from playing from within the wardrobe, avoiding making noise for his wife and children. The research finds Matshikiza too condescending to even imagine that the ‘simple musical sounds’ they made as they made African music, would lack ‘musical time’. The research concludes therefore that the advent of jazz in South Africa was introduced with the same patronising sense as Christianity was over indigenous African faith practices.

The research therefore has some evidence of the impact of jazz on the psyche of black South African musicians, if Matshikiza’s thoughts represent any other of his peers’, other than his own. More self defeating is Matshikiza’s coinage of the title of his article “What our players learnt from the JAZZ PROF”. This, the researcher argues, amounts to Matshikiza’s total self submission to the mercy and authority of jazz as pontificated to ‘their natural gifts’ by Mehegen.

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Matshikiza should have known, that nothing is as precious and priceless as 'natural gifts', especially if he is fortunate to know that he is blessed with some.

Plate 7.1 evidences Matshikiza's original article in which he states personal impressions of his first encounter with jazz. The article is critical in that it is tangible proof available that makes the case of the early institutionalisation of jazz in South Africa. It is unfortunate that the researcher could not encounter authentic testimonies of Matshikiza's contemporaries who experienced the epoch with him. The record of Matshikiza's testimony is invaluable in that it is written in the first person narrative by Matshikiza himself. It is reliable because it is published material. This therefore makes this article, a primary source of evidence of the effect and impact of jazz on the local creative genius, especially of South Africa's finest music minds of all times like Todd Matshikiza, Hugh Masekela, Jonas Gwangwa, and Kippie Moeketsi.

In the article, Matshikiza suggests that he and his other colleagues were predestined to play jazz. The question that this article brings forth is whether the sound of jazz is the ultimate sound of the African musical thought. The question is best answered by taking into consideration questions of history, context and circumstances under which a style of music is evolved. Taking these factors into consideration one would realise that music is actually a learned behaviour shaped by both the affective and cognitive contexts of a people in time. The issue of context brings forth aspects of purpose, function and role that music gets to be used for in time. As times, purpose, function and role of music change, so does the entire sound blend of the music. Matshikiza's point about being predestined to play jazz overlooks how context affects the overall sound blend of a type of music. It is the purpose for which the music is intended that determines the overall style therefore. To some, a yearning for relaxation would inspire the creation of a softer blend of sound of music composition. Yearning for spiritual

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edification or merry making would inspire a more vibrant and pulsating textural blend of sound to others. Therefore the overall psyche of communities invariably shapes the blend of music to suit the purpose for which it wants to use it. The article below is tangible empirical evidence that Matshikiza defended the style of jazz at the expense of these considerations, as if a style is an aspect of predestination whereas a style is a reflection of the overall social psyche and learned behaviour of a community in time.



Plate 7.1: Matshikiza's original testimony.

Plate 7.2 evidences the recording of the first jazz album in South Africa under the tutelage of John Mehegen. The musicians involved included, Hugh Masekela, Kippie Moeketsi, Jonas Gwangwa, Tod Matshikiza, amongst others. This was later dubbed a seminal work of South African jazz.

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Plate 7.2: The recording of the first two 'African Jazz' LPs that were released in 1959.

As the pictures evidence, Mehegan organised South Africa's most gifted sons to play jazz. The first ensemble to be put together to launch the sounds of the black Diaspora in South Africa.

He organised a recording session using many of the most prominent South African jazz musicians, resulting in the first two African jazz LPs.

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The release of the first two Jazz albums by Mehegen in 1959 untrammelled what was to be the first jazz festival in South Africa in 1960. The following year saw the Cold Castle National Jazz Festivals, which brought the attention to the notion of South African Jazz. Cold Castle became an annual event for a few years, and brought out more musicians, especially Dudu Pukwana, Gideon Nxumalo, and Chris McGregor (Wikipedia, 2008).

However in *Drum* (1961), Todd Matshikiza, a prolific South African pianist, believes Africans would play jazz anyway.

7.1.3 The advent of jazz obscures indigenous music

One could wonder why the research investigates the essence of Tabane's quest for originality. This is because the euphoria over the tag of 'jazz' amongst fellow musicians at the time made Tabane's steadfastness on his search for the true soul of African music using his home language art-form very unique.

Philip Tabane had to deal with high criticism of his art and technique because it was often confused and conflated with the art-form of 'jazz'. However Tabane always reminded his critics that he does not play jazz, nor did he set out to do so in the first place.

The following article best describes Philip Tabane's stance with regard to jazz, and mimicking jazzmen. He fought for originality and decried being part of 'a bunch of copy cats'. *The World* (January 1973, 18) evidences Tabane's point:

Why are we a bunch of copy cats?

"There is one thing that really beats me with our musicians. We are just a bunch of copy cats", said guitar wizard Philip Tabane.

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“What I really can’t understand is that we are busy trying to imitate Americans while on the other hand, the yanks are hard trying to play like us.

When I was in the States I played with Pharaoh Sanders, and he is the thing in America. He is making it because Sanders is hard trying to play music from Africa.

It seems to me that Americans are hard trying to find themselves. They are now busy identifying themselves with Black Africa,” said Philip.



Plate 7.3: Original article on Tabane’s pursuit of originality and decries copying Americans with their pursuit of jazz. *The World*, January 18, 1973.

7.1.4 The jazz-sensed social-milieu of black South Africa in the sixties

There seemed to have been great confusion between the supporters and critics of Tabane regarding what jazz actually is. To some it was the mere use of

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instruments famous in the American jazz circuit like piano, saxophone and guitar. Anyone who played any of these instruments was said to be playing jazz, in spite of the content and style of the genre he/she played.

Tabane's determined refusal to be associated with jazz is well captured in Klaaste's (1964) quotation: "He hates mimicking any other jazzmen". The research evidences the intensity of public debate regarding Tabane's music of Malombo. Sidney Sepamla's article in *The World*, July 3, 1968, is such a fiery defence of Tabane's music and technique. Sepamla deems such criticism as narrow minded. In the article that follows Sepamla clearly responds to an earlier attack on Tabane's approach to musical practice. He says:

GUITARIST HAS DEPTH OF TRUE ARTIST

Sir, I am afraid your review of the jazz concert, which featured amongst others, Philip Tabane, was not broad minded enough. To chide Philip for 'using his toes', when playing the guitar is like cursing Jimmy Blanton for fingering the double bass when fashion used the bow.

True Artist

I liked Lionel Pillay, Early Mabuza and Aggrippa Magwaza, but for heavens' sake we have heard all that smoothness and sound before. Philip Tabane says it is about time new forms of expression were introduced into the stagnant jazz scene. To some of us that was the meaning of his so called acrobatics.

To understand Philip Tabane one must accept to be baffled without being cynical. He has the depth of a true artist. He is without doubt creative and consequently his work is likely to be misunderstood.

I am no authority on Philip or art, but I do believe one must be unbiased when appreciating Philip's work.

Lives now

He scoffs at conservative thinking and defies pigeon holes. One can't say Philip is like one's own guitarist. For instance, to attain freedom of

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expression, often discards the continuous musical line. He then communicates as if person to person.

Philip speaks of things today because he lives now. It is important to understand the meaning of the moment in jazz.

Audience Wild.

Philip is one of the very few local artists that stretch out from one moment to moment. Jazz fans will remember that jazz has shown over the years that it can be fashioned according to dictates of the moment, and Philip's entire playing the other day, brought this out marvellously.

I was sorry that he literally did not play with his toes. It may be said to be gimmickry, but one can't deny that gimmicks are a form of originality.

Of course what Philip knows and seems unknown to the reviewer, is that jazz is functional art form. The audience went wild at every turn of Philip's so called acrobatics.

Dizzy Gillespie made the point clear many years ago, when he said: "Jazz is an hedonistic art". For pleasure Sir! Sidney Sepamla, Wattville. (*The World*, July 3, 1968).

It is saddening to realise that while Sepamla puts a formidable defence for Tabane, he does so thinking that Malombo is jazz. Tabane had to deal with the patronising of different sorts. His predecessor General Duze did the same and even questioned his technique. Enoch Dumas in *The World* (1961) represents this patronising sentiment of Duzes' aptly:

GUITAR KING THREATENED

TWENTY-ONE-YEAR-OLD Philip Tabane, one of the best finds of the Union Artists' national talent contests, threatens to take over the title 'guitar king' from veteran General Duze.

Self-taught Philip has a great chance of winning the finals of the talent contest in the Johannesburg City Hall on October 26.



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And what does the great general think of the young Philip? Says Duze: "Philip is a highly talented new blood and he has got a great future." Duze is willing to help him correct his technical faults.

The researcher argues that over the years, all Tabane's recordings evidence no 'technical faults' with his chords or use of motif in his compositions, as General Duze purports. The entire body of Tabane's work evidence a cumulative discourse which can aptly be called Malombo.



Plate 7.4: Public defence of Tabane by Sidney Sepamla, and Enoch Dumas.

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7.1.5 Early usage of western music instruments in recordings of African music

Wikipedia (2008) presents evidence of the growing tendency to use western instruments in recordings of African music of South Africa, especially by black musicians.

- Piano was used in the 1920s to play *marabi*
- In 1959, recording of jazz by Mehegen's band of South African musicians feature a trumpet played by Hugh Masekela, alto saxophone played by Kippie Moeketsi, trombone played Jonas Gwangwa, grand piano played Todd Matshikiza
- In 1960 a saxophone was used for the first time to play lead melody in Spokes Mashiane's "Big Joe Special", and changed South African popular music.

Often when these instrument were used in African music the new sound was simplistically termed jazz. This has been the unfortunate part of South African music history.

7.1.6 Emergence of Philip Tabane and Malombo music

Philip Tabane was not on the same musical path as Matshikiza, Masekela, Gwangwa, and Moeketsi. The latter four were bent on growing the Mehegen hegemony of jazz in South Africa so much that they were always looking forward to leaving the country to join the real masters of jazz abroad. Studying a path of these musicians, one would realise that they indeed ended up in America, except for Kippie Moeketsi. Whilst Masekela, Gwangwa, Matshikiza and Moeketsi were celebrating the release of the first two LPs of African jazz in 1959, 1960 saw the birth of *cothoza mfana* genre of music. This was a brand of smooth *mbube* developed by King Star Brothers (Wikipedia, 2008).

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In the same year, 1960, journalists started acknowledging the emergence of another African style of music. Philip Tabane had found a style that described his profound thinking and deep feelings he called Malombo. This was reported on six years later in *Drum/Post*:

“one day I heard that the Venda people of the Northern Transvaal had a name for soul, - Malombo! That was how I felt - soulful, sad, malombo-like. I had found my name.” (*Drum/Post* January 1966, 16).

Tabane won the 1963 Castle Lager Jazz Contest held at Jabulani Amphitheatre, which was based on Sonny Rollins’ composition called Beck’s Groove. He won the first prize. He interpreted the American Jazz idiom which was originally played on saxophone using African drums, flute and guitar. The research finds it odd that in a country where musicians played ‘simple sounds’, African musicians had to reinterpret an American jazz composition by Sonny Rollins and not present their own original compositions. African musicians had to pay their dues by trying to play something learnt in the way Matshikiza (1959) describes:

We discovered that we have to learn the simple steps, study hard, adding all the musical time to our natural musical gifts.

For Matshikiza, the African musicians’ natural gifts have to be complemented with studying hard, and understanding of time signatures in order to reach notable levels of music proficiency.

The research argues that simple melodies of African indigenous music provided equal or even more, in some cases, sophistication of skill and knowledge application of elements of music. The research concedes however, that the irony of Tabane winning the 1960 prize was a fortunate one. What this proved was that, being at peace with who you are, and starting from the known, can enable

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you to deal with the unknown. It is like starting to learn a science as a child, using one's home language. With solid development of concepts and skill in place, one can then apply these to new contexts. Philip Tabane's victory exemplified exactly that age long principle, of moving from the known to the unknown. This must have been the greatest novelty of Sonny Rollins' composition since that day at Jabulani Amphitheatre.

When Tabane won the '1964 Castle Lager Jazz and Variety Festival Show' prize at Orlando Stadium, the publicity material had not advertised Malombo as a band. It had advertised Philip Tabane as a competitor. It was thereafter that Tabane's style of Malombo received serious attention and recognition (See *Plate 7.5*).



Plate 7.5: Original Poster: 1964 Jazz and Variety Festival Poster

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The proverbial and historic festival was not just a jazz festival as it is colloquially called by most supporters of jazz in South Africa who never saw the poster, or were too young to know about it when it happened. What became popular thereafter was hearsay that it was a jazz festival. Officially, it was a 'jazz and variety' festival. The 'jazz and variety' actually comprised, according to the advert,

"6 hours of rhythm-rocking, fun-filled entertainment, jazz Band Contest, Mbaqanga Band Contest, Talent Contest, Humour, Songs, Sketches"

Once again, it is unfortunate that jazz is given prominence here. It is like saying jazz and the rest. To lump 'Mbaqanga Band Contest, Talent Contest, Humour, Songs, Sketches' as 'variety', shows lack of a sense of appreciation for indigenous idioms of music and the integrity of other genres of the arts. It is perspectives like these that sow seeds of self denial. The researcher finds it unfortunate that celebrating creativity and originality was underplayed. It was rendered almost insignificant by the advert itself. Stand-up comedy, dramatisation of own work, exhibition of own talent, showcasing of an indigenous Mbaqanga repertoire should have been fore-grounded. It is ennobling that Philip Tabane, the great exponent of creativity that starts with being in touch with one's innermost feelings, won first prize against a contest with the likes of Early Mabuza, Kippie Moeketsi Quartet, Makay Davashe, Jazz Disciples, Soul Jazzmen, Coronets, Rhythm Aces, Soul Jazz, and Klooks Septet.

The research notes that Tabane won the first prize playing his own composition, thereby showcasing originality and creativity. This was noted in Sepamla's article, written before the talent search of the '1964 Castle Larger Jazz and Variety Festival'. He described Philip Tabane's music as one that is 'a new blend of jazz' that would be heard for the first time. He pointed out:

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The essence of this type of jazz by Philip is African rhythm, which is provided by the bongo drums. Then the flute sends us further into the woods. Philip comes in and superimposes modern sounds on the rhythm and the result is a completely new blend of jazz. Philip Tabane and Malombo will be heard for the first time during the 1964 Jazz and Variety Festival at Orlando Stadium on September 26 (*Drum/POST*, September 1964, 13).

The researcher notes with keen interest that the 1964 Castle Lager Jazz and Variety Festival was aimed at producing a winner. The contemporary view of a jazz festival is a mere merry making event, something close to a drinking spree. However the 1964 Castle Lager Jazz and Variety Festival had a development agenda and was meant to profile budding artists and talent.

The details of the advertisement are interesting because they contrast well with the contemporary sense of a festival. It is interesting to note that while the present day festivals start at 12:00 midday and end the next morning at 8:00, the 1964 festival started at 12:00 midday to 6pm. The present day festivals have no winner while the 1964 festival had a winner who showcased best originality. The present day festival is predominantly music, while the 1964 festival comprised different other art-forms like stand-up comedy and dramatisation of plays.

7.1.7 Social behaviour in support of jazz

Tabane made no effort not to play jazz. He just made his music in the best way he could, within his capabilities, and in accordance with dictates of his feelings. He never entangled himself in the exhausting and energy drenching exercise of arguing with fellow musicians about what jazz is and what it is not. He just set out to do Malombo music. It was his critics and his supporters who debated what it was they thought Tabane was doing.

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Jazz appreciation societies were the hardest hit of those who wanted to read jazz out of every type of music that either used western instruments or those that were simply electronic. They made it their absolute business to champion jazz even better than the originators of jazz in New Orleans. They even dressed like the Big John Patterns of the world. They brandished original vinyl albums of the likes of Stanley Turrentine as a sign of support to them. In the extreme absurdity they brandished these albums to complete their jazz outfit. This became a symbol of jazz apostleship. This became worse in Pretoria where Philip Tabane lives. Tabane (2008) tells of an absurd situation that happened in Atteridgeville. He points out that when Habby Man was performing in South Africa, members of some jazz appreciation society, literally took a gramophone turn table and Habby Man's records to his show. When Man announced the track he was about to play, they played the track as well from his record and subsequently accused Habby Man for not being able to play like the original track on his own recording. This is obviously a pathetic situation where jazz appreciation societies, just like jazz converts musicians, were bent on becoming jazzier than the musicians to whom Diaspora music like jazz is a home language culture. For these musicians jazz has replaced their own indigenous culture and they have no other.

7.2 Conclusion

The chapter has investigated the early genres of music in South Africa. It also investigated the biased media profiling of jazz in South Africa. The findings that the research has made are that between 1920 – 1960, *marabi*, *mbaqanga*, *mqashio*, *kwela*, were the well top selling indigenous music in South Africa. *Jazz jive*, *avante-garde*, and *swing* became the other popular styles played by the high brow Hugh Masekela, Dollar Brand, Kippie Moeketsi, Jonas Gwangwa, Gideon Nxumalo, Chris McGregor and the Elite Swingstars. This is the team that gravitated towards western influences more in the sixties. The evidence of this is

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that when Mehegen came to South Africa, Kippie Moeketsi and Jonas Gwangwa were amongst those who recorded jazz with him. Matshikiza's testimony was the most telling evidence of their music orientation in the late fifties.

The conclusion could be drawn that the growing campaign for jazz in South Africa divided the South African musicians into those who were avowed African musicians, and those who became the musicians who were fascinated by American jazz. The argument is that jazz changed the South African music landscape and created a sense of inadequacy amongst some black musicians and made them believe that their own sounds were very simple and that they needed to experiment with something more complex, more sophisticated. The researcher argues that it is invaluable to grow own style as a nation than to spend time emulating the music conventions of other people. While it is appreciated that the novelty of jazz sounds are bound to be fascinating to the African virgin ear, striving for originality in the way that Tabane agitated, is the pinnacle of the strategy for developing own unique voice in the world of music.

Tabane emerged as an original thinker who resolutely distanced himself from being labelled a jazz oriented musician. The role of John Mehegen could be viewed in two ways: on the one hand he helped expand the horizons of the world view of black South African about the world of music. On the other hand, he, like all missionaries, took away confidence in African music genres in the way he introduced jazz. Matshikiza is one serious proof of this. However, it could be argued that while it is important to learn from other cultures, it is equally invaluable to strive for the advancement of own voice and originality at all times, like Tabane and his peers did. Subsequent chapters of this research embark on a longitudinal study of Tabane's development of Malombo music, as well as comparative study of other competing musical trends of his time that he had to contend with. Euba (1988), (1989) suggests that analysis of a case study

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such as Tabane's, requires intellectual and intercultural perspective. The researcher will therefore strive for both intellectual and intercultural perspectives in the quest for a clearer understanding of Tabane's Malombo music, and other genres contending for the same space in South Africa.

Chapter 8: Media perceptions of Tabane's performance style of Malombo music

CHAPTER EIGHT

Media perceptions of Philip Tabane's performance style of Malombo music

8.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to investigate the extent of the trapping and dominance of jazz thinking in the South African contemporary music scene, after the release of the first two 'African jazz' LPs in 1959 and how this affected public perceptions of indigenous music initiatives like that of Philip Tabane's. The research aims to carry out such an investigation by doing a survey of commentary of different critics and apologists of the music of Philip Tabane, and present a critical analysis thereof. It is the quarry of this chapter to analyse the commentary gathered on the music of Philip Tabane, including the subject's own views about his craft. In the main, views of jazz critics, top entertainment journalists, show-business editors, and music promoters, will be analysed in this chapter.

Tabane, in *Drum/Post* (1966), makes public statement about the driving force behind the perspective of the music he makes. This was clarified as follows:

One day I heard that the Venda people of the Northern Transvaal had a name for soul, - Malombo! That was how I felt - soulful, sad, malombo-like. I had found my name (*Drum/Post* January 1966, 16).

When *Indigenous Afro-Jazz Sounds of Philip Tabane and His Malombo* was released in 1969, Tabane had already made his perspective clear in this issue, *Drum/Post* January 16, 1966. There was therefore no excuse for anybody to call Tabane's adaptation of the ritual music of *malombo*, jazz.

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8.1.1 Novelty that sparked critical reviews

Even earlier than 1966, newspapers and magazines reviewed Tabane's Malombo music. In these reviews there is clear evidence of attempts to provide a sublime definition of Tabane's adaptation of Malombo music. The definitions and reviews were derived from Philip Tabane's spirited performance. Journalists therefore presented different views of what they saw respectively. They described Tabane's performance style, commented on his guitar technique and skill. It is in the speculative domain of the writings about Malombo that a theory was being constructed by various publications of the time. Amongst others were *Drum/Post*, *The World*, *Zonk*, *Grace*, *Rand Daily Mail*, *The Star*, *Festival Programmes*, and then later, *Sowetan*.

Ray Nkwe, a renowned jazz promoter, reminisces over what he thinks was the origin of Malombo, in a flyer that promoted his 1984 festival. In the flyer he reviews some of his favourite tracks in Tabane's 1969 offering called *Indigenous Afro-Jazz Sounds of Philip Tabane* and his Malombo Jazzmen. Ray Nkwe said:

These are the indigenous Afro-Jazz Sounds of the genius, Philip Tabane – the original Malombo Jazzman. It started in 1964 at Orlando Stadium, when Philip went on stage, leading his group – “The Malombo Jazzmen”. On that Saturday after the Festival, South Africa was staging its third Jazz Festival. Philip and his group walked away with all honours.

Malombo Jazz-music was introduced for the first time that year. This group, started up as a trio and consisted of Flute, Guitar and Drums. Philip has now parted company with the other two members, and today he plays alongside a young drummer by the name of Gabriel “Sonnyboy” Thobejane. This young man is tremendously versatile and plays the Thumb Piano known as “Dipela” in Northern Sotho and Drums.

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On the LP Philip plays Guitar, Pennywhistle, and Drums. Listen to the way Philip plays Pennywhistle and Drums on "Dithabeng". His inherent feel and his knowledge of the instrument can quite obviously be heard. Mastery to say the least! He sings about his sister's child on "Ke utlwile", meaning "I've had enough".

Sit back, relax and absorb the vocal and instrumental artistry of Philip Tabane.

Ray Nkwe: President of the Jazz Appreciation Society of South Africa.

(UMOYA - The Wind, November 1984).

Ray Nkwe's excerpt quoted above, is intended to introduce Philip Tabane to the fans of his 1984 festival. This prelude to the show provides important information about Tabane's music history but with gross inaccuracies. As the researcher pointed out in the previous chapter that inaccurate historical writings about Malombo abound. Ray Nkwe's article in *UMOYA* is but one typical case.

The original poster of the 1964 Castle Larger Jazz and Variety Festival is transcribed in the previous chapter. The information on that poster is the only accurate information about that festival. Most other representations of that festival are inaccurate recollections of the festival that is historic in that its reviews introduce first writings that categorically named Tabane's music and style as Malombo. Earlier writings about Tabane had made keen observations about the uniqueness of his approach to and style of music, but none had called it Malombo. It was only after 1964 that there emerged written records that clearly reviewed Tabane's music and style as he named it Malombo.

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The first inaccuracy in Nkwe's article is that Philip Tabane's group was billed at Orlando Stadium in 1964, as Malombo Jazzman. The second inaccuracy is that the word 'original' and 'Jazzmen' cannot, therefore be used in relation to Tabane at the 1964 Castle Larger Jazz and Variety Festival as these tags are not related to him in the talent contest's advert itself. The name Malombo Jazzmen only appeared in the writings about Tabane after the 1964 Castle Larger Jazz and Variety Show.

Atlantic City Records, the record company that produced Tabane's album, and Ray Nkwe, who produced Tabane's album, did not know how to represent Tabane's adaptation of the indigenous concept of Malombo into popular music appropriately. They called it 'Indigenous Afro-Jazz Sounds of Philip Tabane and his Malombo Jazzmen'. The verbosity of the name denotes problems of conceptual representation by the company and the producer. There is clear conflation of the idea of Tabane's music being an indigenous idiom of music, on the one hand. On the other, there is an irresistible temptation of calling it jazz. The sleeve of the album itself indicates that *Indigenous Afro-Jazz Sounds of Philip Tabane and His Malombo* was recorded on 18 April 1969, in the Johannesburg Studios of Herrick Merril. Besides climbing on the bandwagon of the precedence set by Matshikiza in 1948, and the subsequent Mehegen's releases of the first two African jazz records in 1959, Sepamla is one journalist who named Tabane's Malombo music jazz. Before 1964, the adjectives which were used to describe Tabane's music were 'original' and 'new', but not 'Malombo'. In the *Drum/POST*, September 13, 1964 issue, which advertised the proverbially acclaimed '1964 Castle Larger and Variety Festival' held at Orlando Stadium, Siphso Sepamla described Philip Tabane's music as 'a new blend of jazz'.

The essence of this type of jazz by Philip is African rhythm, which is provided by the bongo drums. Then the flute sends us further into the

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woods. Philip comes in and superimposes modern sounds on the rhythm and the result is a completely new blend of jazz. Philip Tabane and Malombo will be heard for the first time during the 1964 Jazz and Variety Festival (*Drum/Post*, September 13, 1964).

Sepamla, therefore, is one of those who sowed the seeds of distortion of a clearly African indigenous art form of Malombo.

Nkwe's article in *UMOYA - The Wind*, quoted before Sepamla's earlier in the chapter, makes an informative observation that the 1964 Castle Larger Jazz and Variety Festival, was the third jazz festival in South Africa. He and Sepamla's articles clearly evidence minds caught up in the trappings and dominance of jazz thinking that pervaded the South African contemporary music scene at the time. Nkwe makes no effort to foreground the African indigenous music elements in Tabane's new album, yet he claims his publication promotes African music 'particularly.' He asserts:

Umoya - The Wind, is the first issue of a germ of an idea to provide a focus for the dazzling array of 3rd World (and particularly African) music. This edition has a definite Southern African focus (*UMOYA - The Wind*, November 1984).

Nkwe clearly failed to live up to the 'focus' he purports to pursue in his publication of *UMOYA - The Wind*.

The *Drum/POST*(1961) issue had already described the malombo-spirited Tabane in action. It had said:

[The] Twenty - year - old Philip Tabane, the Pretoria guitarist, described as "the wonder boy with magic fingers", took the Union Artists' national

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talent first prize with flying colours on Thursday night at the Johannesburg City Hall. And this was a well-deserved victory for Philip, a self-taught guitarist who showed great originality. He played with terrible feeling, making his instrument seem part of him and his heart. (*Drum/Post*, October 1961, 29).

The excerpt above has steered clear of labelling Tabane's music jazz, in spite of being written two years after Mehegen had started naming music released in South Africa 'African-Jazz'. The *Drum/Post*, October 1961 and January 1966 respectively, preceded the 1948 article by Ray Nkwe. They describe Tabane's performance style without labelling it as jazz. Therefore Sepamla's (1964) and Nkwe's (1984) articles, respectively, cannot plead ignorance of the point Tabane had already made in 1962 that he found the suitable name for his music back then, and the name is Malombo.

Eliot Makhaya was one of the few journalists who never misunderstood what Tabane had long said about his own music in the *Drum/Post*, January of 1966. Makhaya says:

They rocked music lovers. Since then (1964), the jazz idiom in South Africa has changed. This phenomenon is called "Malombo" - the Venda word for spirit.

Makhaya makes the point that Tabane's Malombo music changed the 'jazz idiom' of South Africa. However he does make the point clear that the phenomenon of the music Philip makes is called Malombo. This stern observation by Makhaya, is a landmark of the misnomer of the critical theory of South African musicology developed in the late sixties. This definition of

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Malombo, in itself distinguishes between the music Tabane makes, and the rest of the other genres that existed in South Africa around 1964

In 1965 Tabane parted ways with Julian Bahula and Abbey Cindi. Tabane remained with the stigma of the name Malombo Jazz-men while Cindi called his band Malombo Jazz-makers. It was not long before Tabane and Cindi removed the jazz tag from their musics' names. Tabane named his band "Malombo" while Cindi renamed his band "Africa". Bahula and Lucky Ranku later called their band "Jabula". Philip Tabane was later quoted in the *Eighteen Post* (1971) saying:

I won't play modern jazz. Malombo is 'neither modern nor indigenous jazz'. The form is best expressed by using only bongo drums, guitar and flute. (*Eighteen Post*, May 1971, 23).

Tabane had once again set the record straight. He was on record that he "won't play modern jazz. Malombo is 'neither modern nor indigenous jazz'". This is unequivocal. Tabane made this point without fear of criticism from his fans who had bought into the misnomer that Malombo is a form of jazz. They had read in the papers that Tabane's group was labelled 'Malombo Jazzmen' and his music 'a new blend of jazz', much against his own liking.

When Philip Tabane was criticized for shunning jazz he simply said:

Life is a journey, and not a destination (*The World*, February 1976, 25).

Many pedestrian jazz critics assume that the name of Malombo became associated with Philip when it was first used to advertise Philip Tabane, Julian Bahula, and Abbey Cindi in the run up to the famous 1964 Castle Larger Jazz and Variety Festival at Orlando Stadium, as Nkwe, Sepamla and Makhaya declared. The fact is that the advert of the 1964 Jazz Festival was publicised as "Philip Tabane of Pretoria". It is not fact that the 'Malombo art music' of South Africa

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was first heard at Orlando Stadium in 1964, as it is widely reported. *Eighteen Post* (1971) reported that the birth of Malombo was even earlier, in 1961:

It was the birth of Malombo music and the scene was Johannesburg City Hall in 1961 (*Eighteen Post*, May 1971, 23).

Aggrey Klaaste, a respected journalist in South Africa, was never deluded, even in 1964, that the music Tabane played was Malombo music and not jazz. He explained:

The word Malombo is a Venda word meaning spirit. The type of thing that moves you. Very appropriate term to choose, for the music these men produced at Orlando Stadium moved thousands of semi-hysterical jazz fans. (*The World*, October 1964, 27).

In the article entitled *Record News and Reviews* published in the *Grace* magazine, April 1965 (p. 55), a writer who went by a pseudo name of Dee Jay explains Tabane's music without putting the tag of jazz to it. He says:

They deserved to win the Festival. If you listen closely to this recording you will hear Philip Tabane talking to the guitar while playing. He gets carried away-it seems. No wonder: He wrote all songs for the group.

The new style was called "Malombo jazz" because it gained prominence during the 1964 jazz and variety competition wherein the competition song was Beck's Groove, a typical jazz composition by the legendary jazz saxophonist, Sonny Rollins. It was a competition requirement that the song be interpreted in different styles. Kippie Moeketsi, and other musicians played different South African versions of Sonny Rollins' standard. However no band gave a more indigenous feel of the song than Philip Nchipi Tabane.

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Those who had attended witnessed the spirited “magic fingers” (Tabane’s nickname) with the “magic guitar” hissing, whispering, chiding his guitar and thudded his feet on stage. The result was first rate performance and the style was still Malombo.

It is not surprising that the Malombo spirit could be evident in Philip Tabane’s performance during the 1961 Union Artist show. It is the same spirit that led Tabane through all the twelve phases of the development of the Malombo of South Africa since 1940. As is normally the case, the earliest stages of the development of any idea go unnoticed. Tabane’s inspired performances were described differently by different writers, as they struggle with defining what they saw and heard, with the populist stance of reporting. The journalists vacillated between populism and reason:

wonder-boy (*Post*, October 1961, 29).

the creative, jazz wise, talented guitarist (*Zonk*, May 1962, 9).

the young Pretorian jazzman who has developed the ‘malombo’ or “spirit” Jazz style in South Africa (*The Star Johannesburg*, October 1964, 14).

Philip ‘magic fingers’ Tabane, founder of Malombo music, and leader of the “Malombo Jazz Men”, a player of a “magic guitar”, “the guitar wizard and flute fanatic” (*The World*, May 1969, 2).

prophet Philip Tabane (*Eighteen*, May 1971, 23)

Philip Tabane the jazz genius (*The World*, July 1975, 03).

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Tigrish Tabane (*Rand Daily Mail*, February 1976, 25).

Strumming a guitar like a wild Tiger climbing a tree (*Rand Daily Mail*, February 1976, 25).

An enigma, different from most Afro-jazz acts (Vusi Khumalo - *The World*, August 1976, 13)

'Multidimensional artist', he has incorporated the sound of the flute and the drums into a single instrument - the guitar. The indigenous jazz-musician... an original indigenous...the originator of the malombo sound (Eliot Makhaya,1977).

Accolades like 'enigmatic', 'genius' and 'tigerish' used by journalists in the articles cited above, aptly appropriate both the craftsmanship and the spirituality of the legendary Philip Nchipi Tabane when in full cry. If the spirituality which he terms *malombo* could be reported about from 1961 in the Johannesburg City Hall, Dorkay House show, then he is aptly dubbed by Eliot Makhaya as the originator of the *malombo* sound in the South African music. The sporadic 'tigerish' blend of his voice with the guitar, must surely have earned him and his guitar beautiful names in media like 'wonder boy', 'magic fingers', and the 'magic guitar' respectively.

Philip Nchipi Tabane's mother was a healer- *sedupe*, therefore her *malombo* spiritual style of song and dance, but not the healing practice itself, undoubtedly rubbed off onto him. Philip Tabane's spirituality is an innate power he uses in his music as well as in his entire life, as he puts it with unassuming modesty:

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Ke Ngwana' Ngwako nna. I am an child with a strong connection with my inner feelings and the ancestors, and a profound thinker (Tabane, Interview, 1998, April 2).

Philip Tabane never twitches his face, or sings in a melancholic voice or squints his eyes in a way described in these reviews unless when he performs. Klaaste (1964) puts it aptly:

Philip Tabane the leader of the trio. Listen to the bashful Philip only when he comes on stage ...

When Philip Tabane is on stage reminiscing about his own past he often sheds a tear. He calls this "reflection". He says, "I remember explaining to Mahapi Monareng that reflection means 'profound thinking and intense feeling' ". This sums up Philip Tabane's own definition of Malombo, the art of spirit force music.

In the interview with Day Day Lebepe, the Thobela FM Stereo presenter, Philip Tabane explained Malombo as follows:

Malombo a se setlhopha

Malombo is not a band or a group of musicians I work with

Malombo ke maikutlo

Malombo are intense feelings

Ge o tshameka Malombo

When you play Malombo

O tshameka mmimo wa maikutlo

You play the music of profound thoughts and intense feelings.

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8.1.2 Broader principles of the reviews of Tabane's Malombo music

Tabane's music borrowed different music instruments from other cultures to express the Malombo feeling and spirituality. This has invariably had an impact on his brand of Malombo. Fortes (1936) talks of the dynamism in music brought about by cultures coming into contact with one another. Therefore the use of western music instruments in expressing African music is in itself a dynamic process because it has a capacity to produce a form of novelty. Between 1960 and 1990, Malombo generated intellectual discourse from media perceptions of this particular style of music and performance behaviour.

The definitions provided by the media attempted to provide also the historical mark of when exactly it was that Philip Tabane first experienced a '*malombo*' feel to music.

The researcher argues that Tabane's personalised style of performance and interpretation of *malombo* music could be termed his 'idiomusicology' in that they constitute a basis for a Malombo popular music theory. Different creative musicians develop personalised elements of style/signature, thought pattern, particular use of prosodic features such as pause, stress, intonation, tempo, pitch, and timbre of voice, as well as characteristic use of certain words and phrases, and these are reflected in the body of the music they compose. Music practice then is a reconstruction of the linguistic and world of sound of both the dialect of a community and the idiolect of the individual music maker.

Tabane achieved a personalised representation of Malombo music. His family served as an immediate context that premised his idiomusicology. This is so because his family provided Tabane with a language to describe the indigenous *malombo* musical practice, praise texts which he integrated in the body of his

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lyrics, as well as the tools to critique the good and bad *malombo* music practice and behaviour. This makes his family idiom of music, his particular dialect of African music. Tabane's interpretation of ritual *malombo* attracted commentary from a wider community of critical friends. The research has been immensely assisted by the fact that these different critical views were debated through public media, and therefore generated records of useful literature. These public debates, documented in magazines and other print media, constitute the earliest written critical discourse on Tabane's Malombo music. His idiolect of music, which is his style, is probably largely his family style. Thanks to the brave attempts of South African journalism to define, in whatever way possible, Tabane's concept of Malombo music.

The study of Malombo music as espoused by Tabane brought the investigation to conclusions on broad principles of the arts and culture. At this point the research assumes a hypothesis that there is no universal theory of music. All music theory evolves from a particular orientation of music making. Theories of music are culturally evolved and determined. The researcher further argues that a people's culture equals their collective cognitive, spiritual and aesthetic view of life. Gloag and Gloag (2005) point out that "aesthetics ... describe[s] the philosophical reflection on the arts, including music" (Gloag & Gloag, 2005: 4). The question whether African music would have been enriched or not had African civilisation not encountered Western civilisation is irrelevant. All communities of the world have a God given innate capacity to develop in some way. Technologies of different cultures and people enrich broader humanity. The case of Philip Tabane's Malombo is a classic case that would respond to the assertion. Indigenous spirit force music, has shown the capacity to develop invariably into new directions that used both African and Western music resources alien to the ritual practice, to represent and express the profoundness of human ingenuity. If

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the guitar was not there, some other instrument would still have been used. Perhaps a *kora* would have been used.

Philip Tabane was, in 1998, conferred with the honorary doctoral degree of philosophy in music by the University of Venda, for his contribution to the development of the scope of thought about indigenous musical arts of South Africa through Malombo music and practice. He has been honoured for his contribution to the development of the South African musical arts broadly by accolades in the ethnographic records of the reviews quoted in the research. His development of the Malombo sound is also a development of the South African Cultural Heritage. His unique musical form, the music of profound thoughts and intense feeling has earned him the respect for sustaining the development of a unique genre of music for over three decades. This is the hallmark of authentic innovation in any area of knowledge and development and also inspired this research. It has contributed towards oral-aesthetics. Malombo is today a distinct sound signature that cannot be mistaken for any other type of music in all the mainstream genres of popular music. This is Tabane's phenomenal contribution to the music of Africa and that of the world.

8.2 Conclusion

Jazz thinking deprived the development of African musicology in South Africa in the early sixties to the late nineties. The research finds attempts to label Malombo a form of jazz, inappropriate. Sepamla and Nkwe evidenced a tight wrestle with the definition of Malombo because in their attempt to profile Tabane, they often lost the peripheral vision of the broader picture of Tabane's discourse by labelling it jazz.

Makhaya, Klaaste, and other journalists and critics who wrote for different publications quoted in this chapter, have evidenced critical thinking and clearer

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understanding of discourse. While describing Tabane's performance practice of Malombo music, they were cautious not label it wrongly. The overarching principles of the Malombo music discourse that have emerged in different reviews point to the making of Malombo music as embodying the following tenets:

- Originality in creativity is the hallmark of artistic expressions.
- Spontaneous creation is a dynamic application of ideas and feelings in a spur of the moment.
- Multidimensional musical practice is valuable. It allows one to express oneself with more than one instrument from one culture.
- Inter and intra communications are important skills of musical practice. They allow for spontaneous response to ideas generated in the process of performance.
- Transcendental space of music creation is a personal space, the safest space one must always protect.
- It takes consistency of practice to develop theory.
- Name your discourse.
- Profundity in music creation stems from profound thoughts and honest feelings.
- Sincerity with the inner self, is drawing lasting energy from within.
- Understanding one's home language culture is understanding oneself.
- There is no universal theory of music, all theory is culturally evolved.
- Maxims of cultural communication are applicable to artistic and creative processes.

The research argues that jazz thinking deprived the development of African indigenous music in South Africa in the early sixties to date.