

# SPEAK

CRITICAL ARTS JOURNAL

R1,00

March/April 1978 Vol. 1, No. 2

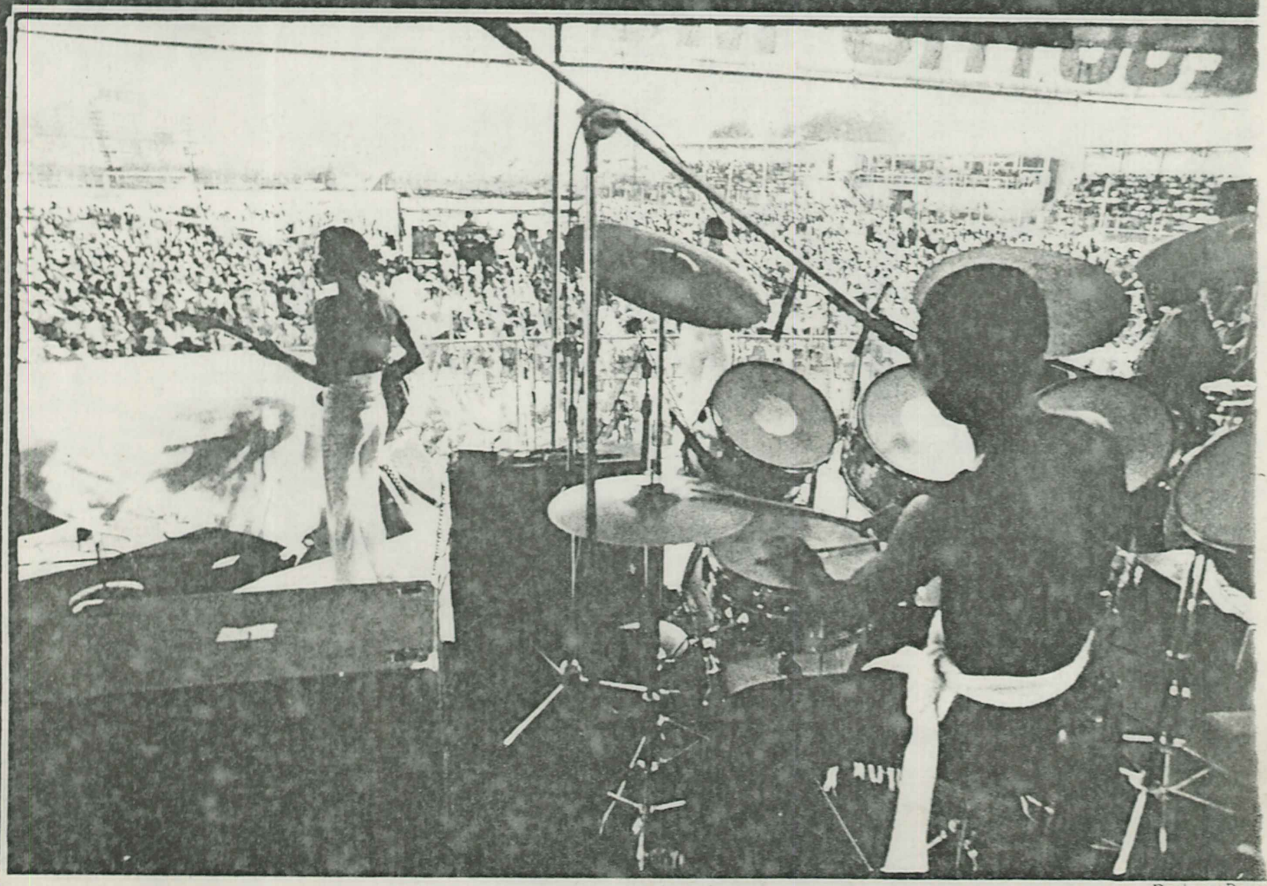


The Gentle Art of Making up Enemies  
Peter Kleinschmidt on Cape Town Theatre  
South Africa's Music Mafia  
Andrew Verster/Stephen Gray/Ken Leach/Richard Rive



# More Rope, Pope and Dope than Cope and Music Nowadays.

DAVID MARKS LOOKS AT MUSIC IN  
SOUTH AFRICA



Rodney Barn



**'The "temporary" attitudes that many whites have is frightening. The lack of knowing what most black attitudes are is even more frightening.'**

**T**o say that South Africa's place in the world of modern music is somewhere between nowhere, Radio 5 and most of Auckland Park may sound ridiculous. But it is. And when one is involved with today's music, our position is tragic – the public have been left unchecked, unchallenged and have been misled for so long that their opinions and reactions have become irrelevant to the music. Besides it's not their music.

Let me hasten to add, that music (our sounds, rock 'n roll, or whatever label you're fixed to listen through, jazz, folk, country, reggae . . .) has, to the horror of many of the classical and traditional generations, been responsible for showing up and breaking down the uselessness and hypocritical spiritual, geographical and social barriers that were fooling lots of people into classes they could never feel comfortable in. Rock music saved them, even indirectly, and proved that history isn't art – that tradition isn't change. And if they are . . . who cares?

The rock revolution – the music revolution – changed many heads and opened many eyes even as far out as Africa. Before the SABC and their political masters had time to apply control, the music had changed the course of many minds, of all age groups, colours and classes.

Ralph J. Gleason (1917-1975), that good old man of rock 'n roll and father of the "Rolling Stone", wrote in 1970: 'Music is the glue which has kept this generation from falling apart in the face of incredible adult blindness and ignorance and evilness. It is the

new educational system for reform and the medium for revolution. It's importance is impossible to over-emphasize.'

I believe that most – well many – of the classical and traditional generations would have preferred the kind of revolutions they're always preparing to cope with – the real blood and guts versions. Even in the early USA days of rock, when the Americans were just putting their brooms away after the witch-hunts of the early 50's, the generation 'in charge' didn't know what to do with someone like Elvis Presley. Here was something they just were not prepared for. I believe it was the last desperate attempt by that generation to put rock 'n roll down for all time. It was also their biggest mistake . . . killing Elvis. They didn't know what to do with him and his 'power', so they got rid of him by putting him in a uniform. That marked the end of Elvis's main contribution to the 'art' of rock, but the beginning of the takeover of the music by the people who understood it. From then on it was straight change; history couldn't even get onto the 'B' side. It didn't matter anymore . . .

Meanwhile, back home at the mine shafts, local 'vets' of that music revolution went on to invade other lands with their talents, with amazing success, I might add. Often, as in the cases of many township musicians, the frustrations involved in expressing themselves has forced them to stoop to the bottom of the bottle for pleasure, living on the deposits to survive, or be forced to sell out to the Ipi



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**'Rock music . . . proved that history isn't art — that tradition isn't change.'**

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Ntombis, African Oddities and other such white 'civilised' angles. Baring their breasts to pre-recorded taped music and other contrived humiliations — "Dey sure got rhydem . . ." Others, affected by the music that made you 'feel free', have been sticking it out in small quantities, either waiting for the sweet breaks or being bitter, (who me???) in their futile attempts at trying to set the record right.

Very unlike what rock, and all it encompasses, is about. Because it's NOT serious. It shouldn't be. It needn't be subject to definition — that's part of its death — history. But South Africa is different.

If people think (those who want to) that the censorship of films and literature has reached alarming and ridiculous proportions in this country, you haven't heard anything yet. That's just it. We've hardly heard anything yet. It's been said that for every 100 films passed by our moral guardians, 10 just may remain somewhat uncut. If that doesn't show everyone where the gods are putting our thoughts for us, in relation to 1977, then I suggest you try and spend a whole day listening to Radio 5 — that'll complete the picture. The frightening thing here is that records, as far as I know, are not submitted for censorship. In other words and music, is your normal everyday average DJ relying on requests?

One of the many functions of music is to reflect what's happening in the streets; another, the old boy meets girl between the sheets. Whereas movies only allow blood and guts with no frames for a screw, just about every computerised disco song is about the greatest of all mankind's past-times and pleasures. Which is great (the idea that is) but in South Africa, totally out of context. I mean, if today's music on radio is a reflection of where our country's heading, we're going to crash into ourselves and get hurt.

I don't believe that the music we hear all day long is a true reflection of public taste at all. But then, maybe the public has been left without a choice for so long that they are incapable of even wanting to choose? Who knows? I don't. But then what gives whoever compiles and chooses our music for us the right to say what we should listen to? Our inherent godliness? Chosen people and all. Politicians have a terribly low opinion of the electorate (judging by the way most voted I don't really blame them) — why would they otherwise insist on all this control and restriction? I thought they thought we were a great 'nation'? Fool! The State controls the SABC . . . but it surely doesn't control or understand the music. Who does then?

Due to the glossy contact via vinyl and promotional points of view, even the ability to 'copy' music, note for note, is being misinterpreted, sounding like out of time and tune computer feedback. Not only are the musicians being misled — there were times when local musicians weren't afraid



Charlie Ward

*Jeremy Taylor — his musical observations seem a little too strong and truthful for local radio to air.*

of making mistakes, of sounding like no one but themselves, when for no reasons the music could simply "set them free" and they could (excuse me) "do their thing". Now, even the general public whom the SABC have been fooling all these years seem to be refusing to listen to any music they don't already know. There is a constant barrage of typical American AM Radio format of glitter and product, where everything's jus' fine, song after song, ditty for ditty, with no chance for the listener to have a say, to get involved, to help move and express what ever it is they notice and need (that's rock 'n roll? sure if you want it to be). All this 'fun' has made the product commercials totally indistinguishable from music 'product'. The local recording industry at very best, is simply a wholesaler for established overseas 'product'. We can all hear that. I understand the economics of doing 'cover versions' and supplying radio with good clean fun, fun, fun and nothing but glossy 'A' sides. The classical and traditional generations are making what they're programmed to do . . . MONEY! But it's so boring. It's got nothing to do with LIFE and it has ruined any chance of local music ever catching up with 1977.

In short, South Africa's main contribution to the world of music (that is over the edge of the world, beyond the Free State borders) is the millions upon millions of rands that leaves this country annually in the form of royalties payable to the creators all over the USA, UK and Europe. Another contribution that this country has made to modern music is the staggering amount of musicians, performers, techni-



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'It's the darkness that gives lots of people something to whistle for. And if you need to whistle quickly why wait until you remember someone else's tune? Make it up without a thought as you go along.'

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cians, promoters, composers, lawyers, accountants, producers, engineers, and so on, that are making it in other countries. Talented people, who if they were at least allowed to feel 'safe' and 'needed' in this country of civil servants, servants, shop assistants and a few others, may have stayed and 'made it' right here. For the benefit of us all.

All this 'fun' has also made many listeners and musicians immune to thought. Besides all this 'fun', we keep getting large overdoses of 'culture' in the form of the histories of music. All those great musicians, artists of past centuries and beyond, who contributed to the world of sound that knew no oil or transplants or psychiatry or concrete or whatever. They take their rightful place in history but no matter how beautiful Brahms and Beethoven may sound I make a point of not listening when I know that they are what James Kruger and Adolf Hitler hear... If that's culture I don't need it. I also do not need their versions of what music (rock music) is all about.

It is these official versions of music that have stifled what little indigenous music we've had. If people realised the amount of good modern music this country has been deprived of from outside (via vinyl and in person), they would be staggered to know how much we have been deprived of right here in our own back yards — because that's where most of our music used to come from. Black music is in a sorry and sick state. One just has to live a little with the township sounds and then switch to 'Radio Bantu' to really become afraid. If ever there was a gauge to show the gap in segregated life-styles then it's music. If Dr Yvonne Hutchinson who heads 'Radio Bantu' is in touch with black musical opinion then we're really almost on the edge. And, if those who are paid to take notice, had any idea of the thousands of township blacks who tune into radio Mozambique, Radio Zambia, Moscow, and the BBC, then they would HAVE to create an alternative here at home, to cater for the tastes they think they control. Or else it's suicidesville for all of us with the compliments of the SABC and partners.

Music is not a threat. It is not a plot... if it is ANYTHING then, in our context, it's a release! It's a lifestyle. Comments and reflections. It's where the 'inarticulate' (thank you) can get to express themselves without resorting to competition — that's a sportsman's laager and music is not a sport. It is also not a business. It does not warrant explanation, definition or restriction. One man's noise is another man's beat.

Knocking the Rock in most societies usually created the sparks that were needed to set the words and music going, but out here we've been

given a false impression of the sounds. Would popular public taste be as banal as they seem if there was more of a choice? More action and reaction. More of the freedom to choose, knowing that whatever tickles your fancy won't be used to ridicule you. If it is it won't matter anyway... just laugh at it and dance; or sit down, feel free and listen!

Which brings me to the final point: Our music, wherever it is, is dead. It's not only isolation that has killed it. It's also not solely those narrow little-grey-men who can be held responsible for the killing. Music doesn't need a paying audience to survive, but it's got to make some sort of sound somewhere. There's always something to make music about — even in the darkness that can be South Africa at times. In fact, it's the darkness that gives lots of people something to whistle for. And, if you need to whistle quickly why wait until you remember someone else's tune? Make it up without a thought as you go along.

The Kwela Kids were chased away about the time the SAP changed their 'Bobby' hats and got de-localised in safari blue. Wire meshed squad vans got rid of the 'little bastards/beggars.' They also got rid of an era that could very well have been the start of what Reggae music is to Jamaica today. Not only music of the people from the street for the whole world — it could've meant a few extra pay-hikes for all those men in blue instead of relying on gold. 1976 made Jamaica millions of dollars in royalties from selling Reggae, via the UK to the world. The Ras Tafari musicians were frequently chased off the streets by the colonial authorities, but the sounds and the desire to make music was never entirely wiped out. Street music wasn't considered any kind of a threat... so the authorities never wasted taxpayers' money by creating State-controlled radio.

The 'authorities' in South Africa have succeeded. They've won. Because many, many hundreds of local musicians and related creative people have either fled the country for a harder life, but an easier head-space, or died of cirrhosis of the liver right here. South Africa has also lost what our authorities seem to like most: Money. Lots of money. Millions of rands is sent out of this country annually. In fact we must be one of the few civilised countries in the world today who send out more money for foreign royalties than we keep for our own creations. A lot of the money that leaves could very well have been paid to the earners right here at home, but if anyone wanted to import the blues, they'd get it from New Orleans, not second-hand from Soweto. Not until Soweto, or Jo'burg had it's own sound, like the days of Kwela.



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**'If today's music on radio is a reflection of where our country is heading, we're going to crash into ourselves and get hurt'**

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It's no good going back and trying to re-create it. It's also no good, as is the practise among the more enterprising and 'creative' business brains in Johannesburg, 'force-producing' something original. That's not music anymore. You can use it in discos, sure. Escapism for the nine to fivers also has its place – for the DJ's and nine to fivers. What about the source? What about the musician? What about the music?

What killed Kwela, sounds like a prize fight story title. Why I pick on Kwela is because it was the first *real* music to ever turn me on. (When Jeppe was a two-way street – and the Bobbies still walked the beat) and because it made record companies like Gallo's lots and lots of money. Aaron Lerole got 11 guineas apparently, (something like 21 rand) for his Kwela composition of 'Tom Haak'. According to a news report, if Aaron (we call him Jakes – in fact Keith Addison, working in Hong Kong has written a book on Aaron, called "Kwela Jake") wasn't such a 'native' he may have earned upwards of R25 000 (TWENTY-FIVE THOUSAND).

Those figures reflect a Public Interest. It's not so much the money (it wasn't mine); it's *why* none of this money – 'clean' profit – fails to find its way into Research or Preservation, even presentation, of any kind. Today things have changed somewhat. I still get this: "We're a business, Marks . . . not a university . . . you want research go to the universities." Music is NOT LIKE THAT. It is NOT, as some heads of a few record companies have said, and do say, like selling shoes. Music has a 'human source'. Even if it's copied it can never be compared to the shoe business. But local music does sound like soulless shoes. Tired and worn out before it even hits the needle. All that red-tape and self-censorship that goes into musical thought out here is enough to make anyone want to run away.

I've been party to the old colonial cliché of "well . . . you know . . . you can't rely on 'them' . . . I also get pissed off with good adequate black musicians complaining that it's the 'system' that breaks and prevents them from going further, and then they rely on it to do so. Up until the June Rising in 1976 I'd spent more than half my ten musical years working on festivals, concerts and the like in Soweto, Mamelodi and Atteridgeville. (The latter two being Pretoria's backyards to the East and West). The musicians were good. Really good. The many refugees in London alone can verify that . . . the one's who've survived to eat, that is. The music was soul-breaking from mid 1975 on. 'Radio Bantu' had started taking its toll. The 'kids' were of course not interested in Jazz (the most predominant township sounds up here at the time) – they were tucked safely away into 'bantú' education and listening to Radio Zambia and the like. One wonders what might have happened had these kids the musical opportu-



*Jonathan Clegg and Sipho Mchunu have worked together for eight years. Only recently did their 'bantú' music get limited air time, though they draw large crowds wherever they appear.*

nities that their foreign counterparts had in Britain and the USA? The violence from abroad, of course, makes the news – they're not going to show rock, jazz or folk festivals taking the pressure off a society – but if those kids never had the sounds to keep them off the streets, I doubt whether many of us would have survived the holocaust – even out here in Africa.

No one can demand, that the musical situation in SA changes. I still believe though there's some hope that music will find it's way out somehow, with the situation as catalyst and those 'involved' and in control as guides. Rock 'n Roll took America out of Vietnam and put a man on the moon many years earlier than anticipated. If the 'beat' was supposed to have originated here in Africa, what's stopping us? The SABC? How they can not even 'allow' experimental words and music programmes, WITHOUT RESTRICTIONS, is beyond me. Just who is this music (which they don't understand) of-fending?

Creative people in all spheres are 'using' this country to get away. The 'temporary' attitudes that many whites have is frightening. The lack of knowing what most black attitudes are is even more frightening. The authorities with all their restrictions have restricted themselves so badly that they're groping into spaces where they should never be. The government of any country should stick to controlling the land's resources and the safety of the people, not delving into their thoughts without thinking.

A bad word or the wrong tune never hurt anybody who's taken the time out to "feel free". The music, where ever it is may save us yet. ●

*David Marks has been collecting & writing music for twelve years. He runs the Market Café, 3rd Ear Music Company and Stanyan Records.*



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