

Dave Marks' Column

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In my last column I mentioned a few musicians and associates who've left South Africa because of the lack of facilities and outlets, many of them to simply get into politically-free breathing ground.

What about the 'lost' South African musicians who never leave?

There are many, I know, but I'd like to inform you about 2 of them, JON CLEGG (a Non-Black) and SIPHO MCHUNU (a Non-White).

They've been performing around Johannesburg (and this year's Natal Folk Festival - please don't catagorise them) since 3rd Ear's TRIBAL BLUES concert at Wits University in 1971.

For many years they're been into a form of indigenous music that even most urban blacks have been 'forced' to disregard in favour of 'imported sound,' mainly from the USA, with great and many thanks to such taste controllers as Ms. Yvonne Hutchinson ... who apparently runs Radio Bantu and claims to know exactly what 18 million blacks want to hear. (She, incidently, is simply driving ears away from the SABC ... and minds ... because the majority of urban blacks listen daily to the same programmes the SAP listen to, namely: Radio Lusaka-Zambia, Radio Moscow, and many many other shortwave outlets ...)

Anyway, JON and SIPHO can't get any airtime from their EMI recordings because they're a colour mismatch ... so as far as the lady in charge of taste control and her employers are concerned Jon & Siphos 'pioneering' efforts into music through plastic do simply not exist.

How many whiteys know that the Natal based choral group, LADYSMITH BLACK MAMBAZO have sold more records than any other artist EVER, in Southern Africa? Infact they are reputed to be the largest selling group in the whole of Africa ... including acts like the Beatles, Sinatra, Elvis etc. Infact, how many whites knew that such a group even EXISTED?

Weird, weird. Very weird. There's a lot that is kept from us, but to keep 'harmonies' away from my ears is ridiculous ...

Anyway, JON & SIPHO were made an offer (before they ever recorded for EMI) by the worlds most important record executive, here in Johannesburg some 2 years ago. The man who founded the ATLANTIC record

(and I was personally involved so it's no publicity shoot) but as far as I know the offer still stands ... while JON & SIPHO'S record company blindly churn out Bantu singles, for a Bantu market that happens to be dictated by Bantu radio executives who are white, unmusical and uninterested in anything but 'product' and 'advertising revenue.' Fair enough (?) At least give the general public a break to decide what they'd like to hear and stop bringing politics into rythmes and rhymes.

JONATHAN CLEGG is a creative, unaffected locally lost African who, despite all the official obstacles and red-tape, will without doubt become an international musical force. It may take him a bit longer than usual, but it'll happen.

JON & SIPHO have been partners-in-song-and-dance for many years now. SIPHO arrived from Kranskop, Natal, to work in Johannesburg, and could speak no English or Afrikaans.

He was still steeped in 'the old ways and customs.' His only friends in Jo'burg were other Zulus who met regularly to dance, sing and tell the stories of their homes. Homesick and lonely, these people clung to their memories of village life and the ways they understood. They seldom mixed with the 'township' blacks, who considered them backward.

One day at Wemmer Hostel, a young white boy turned up, and proceeded to amaze Siphos and his friends by dancing and singing along with them. Siphos could not believe his eyes! This white boy was doing the most incredible things- dancing the most difficult Zulu movements. Only a Zulu from kwaZulu could possibly manage the acrobatic kicks and leaps, and the very special rhythmic interplay that makes Zulu dancing so unique. And here was a white boy doing THEIR dances even better than most blacks! Siphos thought there was something strange about this white boy. He even walked like a Zulu.

Then JONATHAN started telling them jokes and the latest news he'd just heard from their village, Siphos thought he was dreaming. He was listening to a Zulu ... not a white man.

Within a short time JON and SIPHO became very close friends, and so their singing partnership began.

How JON came to be involved with the Zulu ways would fill a book, and there's been more than one offer to do so already ... infact he's been offered film con-



day and age one would think it the most natural thing in the world. How CAN we avoid politics?

Briefly, while JON was still at school, and not yet 16 years old he told his mother he was going camping with friends during the school holidays ... Instead off he went (hitching) to (then) Zulu land. He stayed there and was subsequently adopted by a tribe.

On his return to Johannesburg he'd walk the streets after school playing his guitar, throwing dice and learning new songs and dances in the back rooms of flats. He was often arrested for trespassing. It became such a hassle that SAFMA (The South African Folk Music Ass) had to write a letter, "To Whom It May Concern ..."

explaining that ing was 'rese often harrass could never s true Zulu.

On Sunday walk on rubble SIPHO, from to the other, c for various and outings.

his 35 man d MADHLEBE group, who ag of 3rd Ear an were known (They even da through the V on the second BLUES in 197

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