

NEWS & REVIEWS

DOMINICA

Continued from page 77

culture, be the exclusive property of the young. Alan Lomax had great taste in the music that he was drawn to and one suspects that his own enthusiasm was contagious, drawing exuberance from whoever he trained his microphone upon.

If a single track can be singled out from the diversity comprising *Dominica, Creole Crossroads*, it would have to be the version of "Home, Sweet Home" performed by a school choir. The song was incredibly popular in the 19th century and remains familiar today. Even so, nothing will prepare you for the harmonic clusters generated by these kids as they intone the all-too-familiar line, "Beit ever so humble, there's no place like home."

This song and a later example of home-brewed steel-band calypso both exemplify the extent to which media pollution had already influenced local cultures at the time of Lomax's visit. The grade-school rendition of "Home, Sweet Home" startles the unwary listener every bit as much as a band of Pygmies singing "My Darling Clementine" (the latter sung when they were asked to perform "something old and religious"). Steel-band music swept the Caribbean in the '50s, with its breakneck tempos and sly, satirical lyrics. "Send All Indians Back to India" is a facetious sentiment aimed at ethnic separatists; the instrumental version heard here is underpowered and ragged at the edges by comparison to the great pan orchestras of Trinidad, but the "jump-up" spirit of calypso volunteered successfully in the humid atmosphere of Dominica.

Several recordings of *jing-ping*

bands are strung throughout the disc's sequence. These small ensembles accompany dances of European origin, such as the polka, the quadrille or the *mazurka*. Bamboo drums and boom pipes set up something like grooves with deep, penetrating tones (which in all probability are heard properly for the first time in this cd reissue), as a vocalist and accordionist wait away. Lomax was much attracted to the *jing-ping* phenomena, and with good reason. One hears something like funk in these barn-dance combos, an elastic quality born of the contributing climate and racial input that distinguishes this from, say, a comparably sized Appalachian band, many of which Lomax had recorded previously to this.

"I found what I was really doing was giving an avenue for people to express themselves and tell their side of the story." Humbly enough, with no little altruism evidenced, Lomax described his efforts to document local music around the world. On *Creole Crossroads* the roots of the far-reaching influence of contemporary Caribbean music are easily traced to workman's melodies and children's games. Lomax also had great timing: His field recordings were made in advance of the juggernaut of pan-Caribbean styles, such as reggae and soca, that would eventually run roughshod over tiny pockets of Creole culture such as Dominica. But beyond his commendable role as custodian of fading traditions, Lomax preserved music which, time and again, is enormously fun to experience.

—Richard Henderson



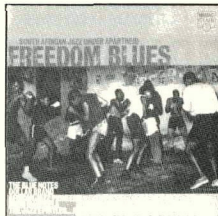
BANJO AND BAMBOO: A JING-PING BAND IN ROSEAU, DOMINICA.

FREEDOM BLUES

SOUTH AFRICAN JAZZ
UNDER APARTHEID
(Music Club 50095, 1999)

Without African creativity and fortitude, jazz would never have come into being in America, and without the earthy integrity of African-American jazz the South African music documented on this cd would not exist. That is not to say that South African jazz is simply an imitation of the African-American genre. Instead, it represents, on the one hand, a vital re-Africanization of the music, and on the other, it clearly basks in jazz's identification with the history of the African-American freedom movement. It is both built upon African-American jazz, and is, simultaneously as a result of its Africaness, the foundation of it. As a symbol of resistance to the apartheid regime, it embodied the interracial harmony of the jazz community, while firmly rooting itself in a black African aesthetic.

The material featured on this recording is a testament to the struggle against the oppressive nature of apartheid, addressing both the brutality of the boot on the neck and the less tangible blows to the human spirit. Lying just beneath the surface appeal of the bouncing rhythms, deceptively simple harmonies and contagious melodic verve are the volcanic depths of despair, hope and defiance that defined the apartheid years. This compilation presents some of the most engaging South African jazz instrumentals of that era, constituting a musical legacy that was largely unknown outside of South Africa, though its power could be glimpsed worldwide through the work of those musicians who went into exile rather than face the creative restrictions, daily indignities and political repression that were the cornerstone of the apartheid system. With the exception of contemporary guitarist Jimmy Dladu's recent neo-traditional composition, "Linda," many of the historical tracks gathered here are rare collector's items, now readily available in the States for the first time.



The opener, "Yakhal' Inkomo" (Bellowing Bull) by Cape Town tenor saxophonist Winston "Mankunku" Ngozi, has the distinction of being the title tune from the best-selling South African jazz album of all time. This is a probing and heart-wrenching (but never syrupy) homage that was composed in honor of fallen cultural hero and fellow saxophonist, John Coltrane. It expresses Mankunku's grief at the passing of the man he called "Daddy Trane." On a less personal note, what follows is exiled pianist Dolla Brand's "Bombella," recorded in exile in 1983 on his *Zimbabwe* lp for the German Enja label (though Graeme Evens in his cursory liner notes mistakenly lists it as being a '70s recording). Like fellow South African jazzman Hugh Masekela's "Stimela," this tune is about the train that carries black migrant workers to and from the gold mines of South Africa. Here the inventive drive of Brand's piano playing exhibits none of the lethargy heard on some of his more recent recordings.

The next track leads us back to South Africa again where we get to hear the buoyant township jazz of tenor saxman Zacks Nkosi, who started his career with the seminal swing band known as the Jazz Maniacs. The tune included here, "Soso," is from 1976 (not 1975 as listed in the liner notes). On this funky outing, in addition to Zacks, we hear alto sax legend Barney Rachabane (who still can be found gigging around South Africa today).

Next up are the Blue Notes who are featured in a tune from the live farewell recording done in Durban in 1964 just before they split for exile in London. The title "B My Dear" is a reworking of Thelonious Monk's haunting ballad, "Ruby My

NEWS & REVIEWS

Dear," and the sadness at leaving one's native land hangs palpably over the proceedings. It features such legendary South African jazz figures as pianist/composer/arranger Chris McGregor, (then-teenaged) trumpeter Mongezi Feza, alto sax giant Dudu Pukwana, his mentor tenor saxophonist Nick Moyake, the woody resonance of Johnny Dyani on bass, and the fiery drumming of Louis Moholo (misprinted as Mohola on the cd), here appropriately subdued for the occasion.

The Blue Notes, an interracial band by dint of McGregor's presence, were by their very existence a challenge to the absurd racial restrictions on musical cross-pollenization that existed under apartheid. Regrettably, all of these jazz luminaries are now dead, except for Moholo, whose '90s output with his own band Viva-la Black has been well documented on the English label Ogun, and whose most recent collaborations include a duet with American avant gardist Cecil Taylor.

The Blue Notes are followed on the cd by the Jazz Epistles (though they preceded them historically) featuring such legendary South African jazz stars as saxophonist Kippie Moeketsi (often called the Charlie Parker of South Africa), Hugh Masekela on trumpet, Jonas Gwagwa on trombone and American jazz pianist John Mehegan taking over the piano chair of Abdullah Ibrahim on this set. They do the standard "Lover Come Back to Me," with Kippie being showcased here on one of their last dates together before Masekela and Gwagwa would join Ibrahim in exile. This treasured session was part of a series of recordings called *Jazz in Africa* which together constituted the country's first jazz lps released abroad.

The proceedings now move to the band Imeko, prominently fronted by alto sax player Bra Benny Khafela, doing a tune called "Marabi," which recalls the early genre of urban South African music associated with *shabeens*, house-rent parties and the festivities sponsored by *stokfel* mutual aid societies. Starting in the '20s, with so many different ethnic groups pouring daily into South African cities to look for work, *marabi*'s multi-ethnic character and


the cyclical repetition of its infectious rhythms have given it a revered place in South African jazz similar to that of the blues in the United States. Though no longer fashionable, marabi is cited by Abdullah Ibrahim as the primary source of his own music as well as of South African jazz as a whole.

Returning to Chris McGregor again, the tune "Switch" boasts his loving arrangement of one of Kippie's compositions in which the saxophone veteran is the featured player. It is done here by the Castle Lager Big Band which McGregor had originally assembled just for the 1963 Cold Castle National Jazz Festival. The festival was held in the township and attracted 30,000 people from the Johannesburg area that year. The aforementioned Blue Notes ended up winning first prize, but the Big Band was also a hit with the crowd.

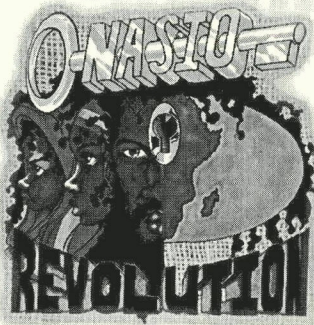
With the latter about to dissolve once that the festival was over, McGregor managed to get them a recording contract to do an album which was called *Jazz: The African Sound*. This record documented that glorious moment in which a monumental sax section consisting of Dudu Pukwana, Barney Rachabane, Nick Moyake, Kippie Moeketsi and bassist "Christopher Columbus" (so named because he discovered new sounds) Ngucane brightly lit up the music's core while the biting trumpet of Dennis Mpali darted in and out of the soundscape, and all 15 pieces of the band were propelled by the thundering drums of Early Mabusa and the orchestration of pianist McGregor.

Back to Mankunku, this time as featured artist rather than leader, on a quintet date credited to Cape Town pianist Chris Schilder on which they do the title tune from the long-difficult-to-locate *Spring* album which Mankunku recorded in the same year as his seminal *Yakhal' Inkomo* debut. The theme was the seasonal one of renewal (and Cape Town can get pretty nippy in the winter as those Antarctic winds blow in from the South), but the title also served as a political metaphor for the eventual resurgence of the forces of change then hidden underground due to the cold winter of apartheid.

Continued on page 80



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SOUTH AFRICAN JAZZ ENSEMBLE **THE BLUE NOTES**, IN THEIR BRITISH DEBUT. FROM LEFT, DUDU PUKWANA, MONGEZI FEZA, JOHNNY DYANI, CHRIS MCGREGOR. (Photo from Chris McGregor and the Brotherhood of Breath, by Maxine McGregor, Bamberger Books, 1995.)

FREEDOM JAZZ

Continued from page 79

For a sample of South African jazz in a more international setting, the cd turns to Isipingo playing "Eli's Song" from 1977's *Family Affair* which features such British free-jazz experimenters as pianist Keith Tippitt and bassist Harry Miller along with the powerhouse polyrhythms of Louis Moholo. This music is as much about the influence of the search for creative freedom on the part of such African-American jazz innovators as Albert Ayler, Steve Lacy, Ornette Coleman, Archie Shepp, Don Cherry and Cecil Taylor as it is about South African struggles for political freedom. Moholo explains this musical duality in the 1995 book, *Chris McGregor and the Brotherhood of Breath* (the latter band that is sadly missing from this cd) by saying, "Free music is it man, it's so beautiful. The word 'free' makes sense to me. I know that's what I want, freedom, let my people go. Let my people go! And that's interlinking with politics, they embrace each other."

After a pleasant excursion into the nostalgic jazz stylings of younger-generation guitarist Jimmy Dulu off of his recent *Echoes of the Past* cd, we return to the classics with the Jazz Epistles lineup of the earlier "Lover" track, doing a swinging rendition of the standard, "Old

Devil Moon." On "Scully Department," though, we finally get to hear the original Epistles with Abdullah Ibrahim on piano. This bombastic tune is Kippie's protest against the apartheid conditions existing in 1960 even in supposedly bohemian Hillbrow (in Joburg) at a jazz club where the musicians were not allowed to drink in the lounge with the customers, but instead were confined to the kitchen during their breaks, so that they would not mingle with white patrons. The finale is appropriately given over to the old-timers' revival band known as the African Jazz Pioneers who do the number "Yeka Yeka" (Let It Be). This is the not the Beatles' tune, but a version of the set piece that musicians would strike up as their last number in the old days when *isotisis* (gangsters) would take over the jazz clubs and force the players to hold forth all night until they collapsed on the bandstand.

The continued resilience of those jazz artists represented here in the face of the apartheid era's everyday infringements on their freedom is indeed inspirational, and the music contained here is filled with the sorrow, pain, anger, joy and love that fueled the dream of liberation that has now only tentatively begun to bear fruit as we enter the 21st century.

—Ron Sakolsky

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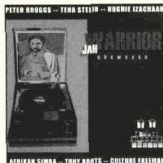
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