

# Power of revolutionary songs:

and drugs thus putting them at higher risk. Fear of the police discourages them from carrying condoms as they can be used as evidence of prostitution.

Also common are fights for space and bullying of new arrivals especially sex workers from other countries. Despite the range of health facilities in Windhoek, participants reported that they feared breach of confidentiality and preferred traditional medicine.

## WAY FORWARD

The Legal Assistance Centre (LAC) amongst others has called for the decriminalisation of sex work. 'Decriminalising sex work does not have to mean the approval of sex work by Namibian society,' says Dianne Hubbard the coordinator of LAC's Gender Research and Advocacy Project.

Lucia Iipumbu, treasurer of the Namibia Planned Parenthood Association said at the Fifth Africa Conference on Sexual Health and Rights in Windhoek that the police should stop harassing and detaining sex workers and gay men for carrying condoms.

'We need to pay particular attention to the need to decriminalise and de-stigmatise the act of consensual sex between adolescents, removing moralistic perspectives in order to ensure they are all able to access information and services,' she said. <sup>LB</sup>

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## In SA's liberation movement

Some revolutionary songs had their background in church hymns whilst some were composed in prison. Others were influenced by international liberation struggles just as some drew inspiration from the local anti-apartheid struggle, writes

**Busang Moiloa.**

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The encyclopedia of South Africa's music, especially the choral genre, will not be complete without the inclusion of the legendary Ntsikana (1780-1811) and the great Tiyo Soga (1829-1871). These two African luminaries have played an important role in the contributions of black South Africans towards modernity. Ntsikana of the Nqika clan in the Eastern Cape is the first African to convert to Christianity as missionaries arrived in the Cape at the turn of the 19th century. He was followed more formally by Tiyo Soga who became the first ever black South African to receive academic tuition in Scotland and was also the first to be ordained as a priest in the Presbyterian Church.

Historically, both Ntsikana and Soga are credited as proselytes who emerged from evangelisation of Christian missionaries and later became doyens of a new experience of cross-fertilisation between the western Civilisation and the culture of the indigenous African people, especially in the Cape. In as much

as the indigenous people were implored and urged to discover the new gospel, both Ntsikana and Soga were instrumental in its transfusion with local cultures. The Bible was thus translated into isiXhosa among other local languages and likewise many hymns followed suit. This process of inculturation spurred the likes of Ntsikana and Soga to compose hymns whose melodies would easily appeal to locals because of the language factor. Ntsikana's Bell (*Ulo Tboxo omkhulu ngosezulwini* - He/she the great God in Heaven) still resonates in churches, cathedrals, religious gatherings, choir festivals and schools as one of the great songs of our history and heritage. Ntsikana sang this song as a clarion call during religious convocations and it remains one of South Africa's classical soundtracks.

By mid-18th century, American minstrels were already performing and touring South Africa. In addition, links established with churches like the American Methodist Episcopal Church brought the influence of



William Matlala

*Songs were composed to defy apartheid oppression.*

Negro spirituals, in as much as the American ships that cast anchor in the Cape brought various idioms of jazz. In an area like Kimberley, the discovery of diamonds led to urbanisation that spawned an African intelligentsia. Since most missionary schools produced the elite of society, most of them moved into areas like Kimberly in search of opportunities and found themselves at the cutting edge of urban cultural explosion.

The first ever native choir had been formed by Jason Balmer and Lillian Dark during this epoch. The pioneer African National Congress (ANC) Women's League leader and a former student of WEB Du Bois at Wilberforce University, Charlotte Maxeke, was part and parcel of this choir that toured Britain and the United States in 1892. These tours co-incidentally led to opportunities for studies and contact with the struggles of Afro-Americans for civil rights for some choir members. These experiences were later to be influential in shaping nationalist struggles of blacks in South Africa for similar rights as their counterparts in the United States.

In 2012, the ANC, one of the world's oldest national liberation movements, marked its 100th

anniversary. During the launch of the anniversary celebrations held in Bloemfontein, the congregation that gathered at its original but refurbished church building burst into the hymn Lisales' idinga Lakhó, which Tiyo Soga composed and was sung at the inaugural congress of the ANC in 1912. Because Soga was so much under pressure to preserve the native language of isiXhosa, he used the latter in composing most of his hymns which he strongly felt would fuse Christianity with the local culture. He therefore made a plea to his religious superiors to let him publish an isiXhosa Hymn Book, which the Lovedale Press published in 1873.

Tiyo Soga's classical hymn was not the only one sung in Bloemfontein. As the delegates wound up their deliberations, a chill ran down their spines as they clenched their fists, swimming in tears to deplore the plight of black people and land dispossession. They melodiously sang Mankayi Enoch Sontonga's ever-green 'Nkosi si ke le!' Africa which is not only today a national anthem of South Africa but other countries in Southern Africa. Fast forward to the 1920s and 1930s, the influence of choirs and political songs became more felt among

some of the nationalist leaders of the time. The first president of the ANC, John Langalibalele Dube, who was educated at Columbia University in the US, was instrumental in establishing the Ohlange Training Institute in KwaZulu-Natal in the 1930s. Part of the cultural spin-offs of Ohlange was the initiation of a choir at the behest of Dube and was under the guidance of the innovative choirmaster and composer Reuben Caluza.

Dube was not only enamoured with choral music but was equally a hipster who owned a jazz band during his illustrious political career. Missionary backed educational institutions such as Lovedale College and later Fort Hare in the Eastern Cape were also central in the introduction of choir music. Key figures such as Professor ZK Matthews who married Frieda Bokwe – the daughter of the legendary John Knox Bokwe, as well as Don Tengo Jabavu who was the eldest son of *Imvo Za bantsundu's* founding editor and owner John Tengo Jabavu, were part of the early choirs which sometimes toured and performed in areas like Cape Town. Reverend John Knox Bokwe, is one particular figure who certainly holds the crown of being the founding

father of choral music in South Africa. Bokwe, who learned how to play piano and organ at a tender age, actually notated and harmonised Ntsikana's Bell. His seminal composition Plea to Africa, which he composed following his first visit to Scotland in 1892, was a favourite of the late Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) leader Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe and he often sang it during the time he spent incarcerated in solitary confinement on Robben Island.

The history of classical and popular music in South Africa is full of stars like Benjamin Tyamzashe, Reuben Caluza, Solomon Linda, Princess Magogo ka Dinizulu who is the mother of Prince Mangosuthu Buthelezi, Khabi Mgoma, Joshua Pudumo Mohapeloa, Sipho Nathaniel Sidiyio, Mosweu Michael Moerane, SJ Khoza, AM Matjila, Todd Matshikiza, Michael Masote, Urbania Mothopeng, Mzilikazi Khumalo, Gibson Kente, Madoda Victor Ndlazilwane, Mackay Davashe, Gideon Nxumalo, and Dorothy Masuka... the list is endless. The immeasurable contribution of these great men and women, who composed a corpus of songs, will continue to inspire generations to come. Their seminal works will immortally remain part of our country's folkloric and classical canon.

Today, as the legacy of those who came before continue to march towards the wheels of history, the torch continues to be carried by the likes of SBP Mnomiya, Nolufefe Mtshabe, Makhaya Mjana, Mokale Koapeng, Richard Cock, Theriso Tsambo, Ellen Nqatha, Hendrick Hoffmeyer, Lebogang Morake, Mhleli Victor Ntoni (who passed on in 2013 and may his soul rest in peace!), Joseph Tshabalala and many other men and women too numerous to mention. They continue to be inspired on the foundation built many years ago by their predecessors. Because of the universality of the music aesthetic, they have and continue to

also absorb influences from across the spectrum. These range from European classical masters such as Mozart, Beethoven and Handel.

They further draw inspiration from groups such as the California based Sweet Honey in the Rock whose founder Bernice Johnson has been active from the time of the civil rights movement in the sixties, as well as ragtime from the early pioneers of the jazz movement such as Jerry Roll Morton and Scott Joplin. In the Cape, part of the choir tradition was influenced by among others, the Malay sounds brought by the slaves from the East who were brought by the Dutch, as well as Angola and the parts of the coast of Central Africa from the middle of the 17th century. These disparate influences that include those of the indigenous Khoi and the San, form the bedrock and foundation upon which a distinct sound of the Cape finds expression. One finds it even in the contemporary musical idioms of the area. All this musicality and brilliance which forms part of the history of human progress, is best captured by the German philosopher Nietzsche, who said that life would have been incomplete without music.

## MILESTONES

In a documentary of Miriam Makeba, the great African empress of song, she regales how in 1947, they had at their school rehearsed HJM Masiza's *Vukani Mawethu* for King George's visit to South Africa. Unfortunately due to adverse weather conditions, they were not able to sing the song for the King. It is this very song that was later banned by the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) because of its lyrics that called for unity and the rise of consciousness among black people. One may ask why such an overtly political song would be practised to welcome the King of England. Remember that the strategy of the national liberation movement in particular the ANC was still based on fighting the systems from within through the Native Representative Councils. Little wonder that one of the forms of expression was through the medium of song.

Earlier on, it is this same song which was popular within the ranks of the Industrial Commercial Union (ICU) led by the Malawian migrant labourer Clemens Kadalie in the early 1920s. Their protest marches and meetings would never be complete without choir songs



*Dancers entertained workers during strikes.*

William Maitala



and in some instances, performances by brass bands. Apparently, S. Mutla from Bloemfontein was the main force who composed songs sung in meetings of the ICU that called for the improvement in the welfare of African workers in the commercial and industrial sectors of the economy. In an area like Durban, choirs like No Fear No Harm and the Solomon Linda driven Evening Birds, staged frequent performances at the Durban Workers Club which was a cultural wing of the ICU.

The singing of the ICU under AWG Champion often reflected resistance against land dispossession by newly arrived urban dwellers in areas like Umkhumbane (Cator Manor). Events such as the Bambatha Rebellion against poll-tax in 1906 were still fresh in the memories of those who migrated to big cities in search of jobs, only to be met by yet another form of exploitation in the factories and the docks in the burgeoning urbanisation of Durban and its nearby metropolis. A song like *Poll Tax* by the Dundee Wandering Singers certainly puts *mbube* as a style of popular music which has its roots in the struggle against land dispossession, oppression and exploitation.

A song like *uPoni* which is an original composition by BB Myataza about the exploits of a pony and its owner who adores it, was in the 1980s to be given a political slant that formed part of the ANC's Amandla Cultural Ensemble's repertoire. Guess who was behind this? One of the movement's most revered leaders Oliver Reginald Tambo, added new revolutionary lyrics and the song came to be known as *Umkhonto*, with the same melody and harmonies of the original composition. This was hardly a surprising feat from Tambo who was himself a choirmaster. His passion for music permeated his life from the time he was still in South Africa where he even taught at St Peters Higher Primary School in Rossetenville in the late 1950s.

He would, apart from being as seasoned political leader, continue with his other talent and creativity in the ANC camps to conduct a choir or two when time permitted in his tight schedule. Songs such as JP Mohapeloa's *Mosboeshoe*, were some of the hits that were sung to celebrate the bravery of some of the heroes and heroines who resisted colonial conquest.

In 1964, three SACTU leaders Vuyisile Mini, Zinakele Mkaba and Wilton Khayinga, were executed for their activism in the ANC's underground armed activity. Mini, who among the three was known for his infectious smile and melodious singing, composed a number of songs at that time such as *Nantsi indoda emnyama Verwoerd* that still resonated through the 1960s, 1970s, and 1990s. It is amazing that even when faced with the hangman's noose, the three leaders still sang with remarkable bravery as they descended to the gallows.

The Dutch anti-apartheid movement was one of the most active in the world. Apart from campaigning for the isolation of the apartheid regime, they also organised major arts and culture festivals with the ANC in exile. Following the *Culture and Resistance* festival that took place in Gaborone in Botswana in 1982, a Culture in Another South Africa (Casa) took place in Amsterdam later in the 1980s. *Zabalaza* soon followed in London and further solidified the international dimension of the anti-apartheid struggle to greater heights thus bringing the hopes and aspirations of the vast majority of the oppressed both inside South Africa and in exile, closer to freedom.

As the winds of change wafted through the corridors of the apartheid edifice, possibilities dawned to hold a similar festival locally that pre-figured the arts and culture of a new South Africa. One such festival took place on our shores in the early 1990s at the Market precinct in Newtown. One

memorable part of the festival was a rare performance by ace *maskandi* and jazz guitarist Bheki Khoza and Jennifer Ferguson. Their rendition of the *Red Flag* which Jennifer interestingly sang in Afrikaans, seemed to inspire a new sense of temporary optimism especially in the wake of the collapse of the former socialist countries in Eastern Europe.

Repression led many musicians into exile. Among many who left the country in search of greener pastures and room for creativity, was one of the greatest bassists of all time Johny Mbizo Dyani and a fine pianist Abdullah Ibrahim also known as Dollar Brand. These two great South African musos were among others who looked up to home for inspiration in their approach to jazz melodies and improvisation. Listening to their version of *Ntsikana's Bell* in their seventies album *Good News from Africa*, one will understand why during their travails of exile and being exposed to different influences and cultures, home still remained where the music is.

In his album the *Dream Keeper*, whose theme is based on a poem of Langston Hughes, another American jazz double bassist of note Charlie Haden, also did a freer version of Sontonga's *Nkosi si ke leli 'I Africa*. In this case, not only was this an expression of solidarity with the struggles of the people of South Africa, but an influential contribution by a South African composer to the nobility of the human spirit through the power of song. This is typical of Charlie Haden's Liberation Music Orchestra, who are known for soaking themselves in popular songs like *Sandino* and giving them a jazz interpretation. Sandino is a nationalist figure in Nicaragua after whom the ruling and left leaning Sandinista National Liberation Front is named.

Very often some of the songs are related to sites of struggle at a particular point in history. Examples abound as it was the case during repression under Chile's Pinochet in the 1970s. A case in point is

that of Victor Jarra who sang revolutionary songs at the time of repression by the junta of Pinochet that toppled the democratically elected Popular Unity government of Salvador Allende through the assistance of the Americans and their Central Intelligence Agency. He had his hands chopped by the military in one of the most atrocious crimes committed against the Chilean people. After chopping his hands, the perpetrators threw the guitar at him to continue to sing and laughed at him as he couldn't play and sing for the most obvious reasons. He was later shot and killed. In a further display of brutality, the master tape of his songs was also destroyed so that there is no trace of his legacy. Chilean songs therefore became the epicenter of the international solidarity movement with the Chilean people against repression.

In South Africa, one cannot help but remember how one Jessica Sherman, more than three decades ago, strummed her guitar and sang revolutionary songs in praise of ZIPRA (the former armed wing of the Zimbabwe African Peoples Union) and Frelimo (Front for the Liberation of Mozambique) during the gatherings of the fledgling mass democratic movement. This was in the wake of Mozambique's independence in 1978 and followed by Zimbabwe in 1980. The national liberation projects of the two countries, served as a source of inspiration for both Namibia and South Africa which finally broke the shackles of apartheid colonialism in 1990. It is these kinds of artistic examples that are missing in today's gatherings of the progressive movement. <sup>18</sup>

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# History of worker choirs

Although worker choirs were part of the trade union movement's struggle against apartheid they found themselves in a new terrain after democracy in 1994, **Busang Moiloo** traces their role during this transition.

**A**fter the Durban strikes that followed in the wake of the banning of the PAC and the ANC in the 1960s, pressure mounted further, especially after the 1976 riots, on the apartheid state to introduce reform. This led to the Wiehahn Commission that legalised independent trade unions that organised mostly African workers. This development culminated in the formation of the Federation of South African Trade Unions (Fosatu)'s (Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu)'s precursor) in 1979. Another development was the coming together of a multi-sectoral organisation in the form of youth, civic, sports and various voluntary sector organisations, which spawned the United Democratic Front in 1984. The form of organisation that took shape during this time galvanised itself in a way that had a great impact from the mid-1980s and later, on the political landscape of the struggle by organised labour and political mass formations such as the UDF. Culture became an 'arena of struggle' through song, posters, theatre, and poetry, dance and so on. Unions were not left behind.

## CASE OF FOSATU

Fosatu not only raised shop floor and broader community issues like evictions, but also started worker choirs among various industrially organised affiliates such as the Transport and General Workers Union (GWU), Metal and Allied Workers Union (MAWU), and Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU). The affiliates which had worker choirs and cultural groups recorded the historic stellar album under the title *Fosatu worker choirs*. This album, recorded by the independent Shifty Records was a milestone in the history of the trade union movement and its struggles for a better South Africa. It is a pity that because it was only available on vinyl, it has not been re-issued on a CD format. Downloads are nevertheless available on the Internet.

In their approach to present their music not only to its affiliated membership but to the broad listenership in South Africa, Fosatu worker choirs used styles steeped in the tradition of *iscathamiya*, *mbube*, and the popular song. This should barely be surprising because most