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**South African Jazz Culture:
Texts, Contexts, and Subtexts**



WB

the world of music (new series)

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Jazz Festivals and the Post-Apartheid Public Sphere: Historical Precedents and the Contemporary Limits of Freedom

Brett Pyper

Abstract

In this article I attempt to bring into dialogue two bodies of research that seldom inform one another: critical attention to the contested social history of the public sphere, and management practices as conceived and implemented by those who assume leadership roles within that sphere. In the process, I demonstrate that the mounting of a jazz festival has become a kind of meta-cultural performance in its own right. Drawing on my professional experience of working in the South African festival sector, and having reviewed the extant literature that is of relevance in (re)constructing this cultural domain, I report on an interview with a former colleague, the founder of the Cape Town International Jazz Festival, and quote other contemporary sources to characterise the current situation as South Africa continues to wrestle in contexts of public jazz presentation with the racialised inequalities of its past and its present almost a quarter-century after the formal end of apartheid.

“The festival has always been a litmus or metaphor
for the limits of freedom.”

(Tony Marcus¹)

Jazz festivals play a distinctive role within contemporary public culture in South Africa that in part reflects their historical efficacy in constituting an oppositional public sphere in the face of racialised capitalism and apartheid. Today, however, this heritage is increasingly refracted by the inequalities of our times. Such inequalities have in part to do with the neoliberal festivalisation of culture internationally, as commercially-oriented festivals have become primary sites of cultural programming and public engagement, periodically assuming some of the functions of established institutions of public culture like concert halls, theatres, museums and the like in the face of the evacuation of consistent public funding.² These global developments happened to coincide with the transition from apartheid in South Africa in the early

1990s. They also thus coincided with the concomitant reintegration of the country into international circuits of commerce as well as non-profit cultural exchange after decades of cultural boycotts and the widespread dispersal into exile of many local jazz musicians.

I argue elsewhere that South Africa has registered both the global drift towards festivalisation and provided distinct national and local manifestations that resembled and reinforced this trend (Pyper [in preparation]). I have also pointed out that the festival sector in South Africa remains one of the few areas that remains relatively robust within a distinctive postcolonial cultural sphere burdened not only by the downturn in arts funding in the wake of the globalised financial crises of 2008 and their aftermath,³ but also by conditions shared by many so-called developing countries whose arts sectors coexist and partially overlap with significant informal cultural spheres. Festival events in South Africa are moreover staged amidst nationally specific funding and capacity challenges facing many formal cultural institutions. Festivals thus, I have argued, illustrate multiple, sometimes contradictory contemporary trends, offering a barometer of the refiguring of the public sphere writ large in the wake of apartheid in an increasingly interconnected and globalised constellation of public spheres.⁴

While the modest published histories of, and scholarly commentary on, the festival sphere in South Africa have tended to prioritise the perspectives of theatre practitioners,⁵ foregrounding the specific histories and more recent development of jazz festivals brings some of these broader dynamics into even clearer focus, which is my purpose in this article. I aim to show that the mounting of a jazz festival has become a kind of meta-cultural performance in its own right, carrying resonant sedimented historical meanings (whether these are conscious or not) and revealing cultural aspirations that frame the performances of jazz musicians themselves (who, like their audiences, can deliberately or unknowingly reinforce or subvert the circumstances of their presentation). I will thus, while cross-referencing writing that contextualises festivals in general, aim to draw out the specific histories and valences of jazz festivals in South Africa because I regard them to be diagnostic of both the striving towards, and the limitations on, the kinds of freedom to which Tony Marcus refers in the epigraph above.⁶ Drawing on my professional experience of working in the South African festival sphere over the past quarter-century, and having reviewed the extant literature that is of relevance in (re)constructing this cultural domain, I report on an interview with a former colleague, the founder of the Cape Town International Jazz Festival, and quote other contemporary sources to characterise the current situation as South Africa continues to wrestle in contexts of public jazz presentation with the inequalities of its past and its present almost a quarter-century after the formal end of apartheid. In the process, I attempt to bring into dialogue two bodies of research that seldom inform one another: critical attention to the layered, internally variegated, and contested social history of the public sphere on the one hand, and the management practices as conceived and implemented by those who assume leader-

ship roles within that sphere. I reflect in the conclusion on what I deem to be the as yet unfulfilled promise of such a dialogue in the light of the account that follows.

Jazz Festivals in South Africa: Precursors to the Post-Apartheid Festival Sphere

Festivals in various formats, initiated by a range of role players, were a notable feature of public culture within various African communities across the country for much of the twentieth century, especially around the urban socio-economic nexus of Johannesburg. By the late apartheid era, however, such historical precedents found relatively little expression on those publically prominent festival programmes that did feature jazz.⁷ In the early 1990s, South Africa entered an as yet uncertain transition towards relatively free political organising and the extension of the franchise beyond the white, settler-colonial citizenry,⁸ thereby significantly extending the mandates of the cultural infrastructure of the state and percolating through civil society. At that time, the nationally prominent festivals that existed tended to have their origins in contrasting, if not competing, aspects of settler-colonial experience (English liberal vs. Afrikaner nationalist)—even where they later adopted critical positions towards their own founding assumptions (Pyper *ibid.*). It was thus to be expected as the country entered an avowedly post-apartheid dispensation that commentators increasingly called for a festival sphere significantly grounded in indigenous, Pan-African and/or cosmopolitan African perspectives and sensibilities. Since the pre-history to these developments to which I have alluded has been relatively well documented (if largely by scholars from outside the communities of practice whose agency they documented), it can be rehearsed in brief here, since it provides important historical coordinates for the post-apartheid developments that I recount below.

In his landmark survey of urban black South African city music and theatre, *In Township Tonight!*, anthropologist David Coplan (2007 [1985]) provides pertinent references to a range of festival-like events that took place since the first half of the twentieth century. Among several settings that should be counted among the precursors of the contemporary festival sphere in South Africa were those (co)created by a repressed U.S.-American- or European-educated African elite well before the start of the official apartheid era in 1948. These notably include the colonially imported Welsh presentational form of the *eisteddfod*, which was adopted across various cultural communities.⁹ Though they were organised in several parts of the country, the *eisteddfodau* organised at the celebrated Bantu Men's Social Centre (BMSC)¹⁰ in Johannesburg from the 1920s onwards (Coplan 2007 [1985]:143–4), had acquired the status of a national event by the mid-1930s (*ibid.*:139).¹¹

Coplan describes these *eisteddfodau* in terms of an oppositional “elite national culture” that stood in an ambivalent relationship with indigenous African cultural values, especially to the extent that these proto-festivals initially tended to exclude working class African popular cultural practices. Considering that this partially as-

simulationist, class-based African cultural nationalism of the 1930s was challenged by the contemporaneous rise of Afrikaner nationalism and the ascendancy of the latter to state power by the late 1940s, the cultural ideals articulated at events in places like the BMSC were only partially realised and were thus to remain aspirational for much of the twentieth century. The literary and artistic legacies of African composers, playwrights and other artists of the time, including several jazz musicians, reveal a collective struggle for collective self-definition from an ambiguous if not precarious position between the competing exclusion of English liberalism and Afrikaner nationalism on the one hand, and their complex relationships both to rural African tradition and their urban locations on the other. These African nationalist ideals would develop in other ideological directions as overt political oppression and the dispersals of exile would come to reframe them. Thus, as the struggle against apartheid intensified, class-based aspirations that included some degree of European assimilation came to be softened or were replaced by, or overlaid with, the building of cross-class political and cultural alliances of more assertively Africanist persuasions. Given its (admittedly contested) status as both an art and a popular music, jazz played an important role in this process, which has extended well into the post-apartheid era.

Another historical milestone among earlier attempts to construct a black public sphere in South Africa was the Johannesburg Bantu Music Festival (JBMF), which was presented between 1947 and 1956. A collaborative interracial initiative, its introduction on the very eve of the ascendancy of apartheid inevitably proved to be ill-fated as segregationist legislation penetrated every aspect of social life, rendering such collaboration increasingly compromised (Coplan 1985:168–70). Coplan reports that the JBMF was not popular among jazz musicians, who experienced artistic interference on the part of whites as well as the “ethos of amateurism” whereby competitors were required to rehearse a “set piece” in pursuit of a trophy “when recordings and live performances in the white-controlled entertainment field paid real money” (1985:169). So the association of prominent jazz musicians whose work may have crossed genre boundaries with the JBMF tended to emphasise their more classically oriented work, notably the major commission for Todd Matshikiza’s cantata *Uxolo* in 1956.

As the hold of apartheid legislation on the few sites of interracial and relatively autonomous black cultural self-expression tightened through the course of the 1950s and into the 1960s, resulting in the demolition of iconic neighbourhoods (like Sophiatown in Johannesburg, District Six in Cape Town, and many unsung places like them), and, pertinently, the closure of venues associated with jazz performance, Coplan points out that “the only major venues left were big concerts and outdoor jazz festivals in Soweto and its counterparts, famously sponsored by South African Breweries with the organisational support of United Artists” (2007 [1985]:245).¹² As I have highlighted elsewhere, the relative informality associated with festivals seems for a time to have kept open possibilities for public cultural expression that had already been precluded in more formal institutional settings (Pyper *ibid.*). These

latter open-air festivals, branded after the sponsor's flagship beverage, the "Cold Castle" Jazz Festivals, were presented in Soweto between 1961 and 1964, and focused on South African jazz in ways that countered the segregationist and reductive neo-tribalism of apartheid in their programming.¹³ The involvement of Union (not, as Coplan has it, "United") Artists in the emerging township jazz festival circuit would have been significant because it would mark continuities between Johannesburg's ailing but nationally iconic urban public culture, centred on townships like Sophiatown and Alexandra, with those of the spatially peripheral townships that were rapidly expanding in the face of the forced removals of African citizens from city neighbourhoods under apartheid legislation. Furthermore, in implying links between the musical training provided by Union Artists at the celebrated Dorkay House, the home base of Union Artists, it would mark connections between profoundly influential cultural activism and arts education initiatives of the time¹⁴ with the township festivals that attempted to knit together aspects of the city's cultural tissue that were officially being rent apart as traditional inner-city jazz centres were literally being destroyed.

The jazz festivals that were presented in Soweto between 1961 and 1964 demonstrated the continued local purchase of this music as apartheid continued to be entrenched, despite many musicians going into exile. But the Cold Castle Jazz Festivals also illustrated the mounting obstacles to sustaining public sites of autonomous urban black cultural expression. They came to a tragic end in 1964, when violent incidents took place both inside and outside the stadium and six men died outside the gates, reportedly in a confrontation between rival gangs (Coplan *ibid.*:246). In the wake of these events, the series was discontinued.

For Coplan, the discontinuation of the Cold Castle Festivals represents an extreme but not entirely isolated instance. Initially writing from the vantage point of the early 1980s for the first edition of his monograph, he presented festivals as a precarious, if enduringly important, platform for what public cultural expression was possible as the high apartheid era dragged on, while noting many pragmatic as well as socio-political obstacles facing festival organisers of the 1970s. The latter ranged from "social, organisational, and programme conflicts" to "poor arrangements, bad sound systems, lack of accommodation and transport for performers and fans, no-shows, police harassment, and a get-rich-quick attitude among promoters and musicians." For Coplan and his interlocutors, the root problem remained apartheid, which rendered an autonomous, self-supporting, culturally relevant black music world "impossible" and created social conditions "in which frustration and violence in black urban communities could not be excluded from major performance occasions" (reiterated in Coplan 2007 [1985]:246).¹⁵ Nonetheless, despite these drawbacks, Coplan notes that "the festival format remained the only workable commercial setting for live jazz and its various popular hybrids, and despite unprofessional, dishonest producers and unreliable participants, festivals were held in townships near various cities every year" (*ibid.*).

Such initiatives doubtless persisted, but faced considerable odds as the struggle against apartheid escalated into the 1980s and draconian legislation under successive officially declared “states of emergency” rendered virtually any public gathering in the segregated townships illegal. As the interlocutors in Gwen Ansell’s comprehensive history of South African jazz, *Soweto Blues*, recount, even at the semi-private social gatherings at which jazz recordings were played,¹⁶ “meetings were often curtailed by a district in flames, or under military occupation, or members ‘banned’ and forbidden to gather in company” (Ansell 2004:157). Under such conditions, the semi-public gatherings of members of jazz appreciation societies appear to have played a crucial if largely undocumented role in keeping a certain kind of jazz-oriented public culture alive.¹⁷ Alternatively, immediately across the national border, festivals presented in neighbouring states like Botswana, Zimbabwe and Lesotho played an important surrogate role in keeping this mode of public culture alive and offering those artists and audiences who were able to leave the country and return an opportunity to hear exiled South African artists live.

This history has, since the 1980s, been recounted in major studies of South African jazz culture (notably Coplan *ibid.*; Ballantine 2012 [1993]; Allen 1993 & 2000; Ansell 2004), helping to round out the literature on festivals in South Africa, if mostly in passing. This secondary literature amply demonstrates that the relative paucity of festivals that centred black South African expressive traditions, repertoires and sensibilities as the country entered the transition from apartheid was not the consequence of any purported cultural deficit within black communities, but, on the contrary, that many such communities had struggled to sustain festival-related spheres across much of the twentieth century, whose development was deliberately suppressed under apartheid. It is for such reasons that the significance of jazz festivals within the broader festival sphere in contemporary South Africa merits attention, given the particular role that this music has historically come to play in mediating the complex and fraught relationships between modernity and tradition, indigeneity and cosmopolitanism, cultural relationships across “racial” lines, and the claim to the city of citizens pushed to peri-urban peripheries. With reference to more recent developments, I have elsewhere framed this in terms of attempts to enlist the music and its associated representations and relations in the crafting of a post-apartheid nation, economy and culture (Pyper 2013:152).

Jazz Festivals and the Post-Apartheid Public Sphere

Given the importance that Coplan accords to festivals as “the only workable commercial setting” for live jazz and related musics under high and late apartheid, it stands to reason that the latter were among the first public cultural expressions to re-emerge after the formal end of that regime.¹⁸ In this section, I briefly trace the emergence of the major post-apartheid jazz festivals, foregrounding what has arguably come to be the most celebrated, the Cape Town International Jazz Festival. But

before considering the most prominent newer platforms, it also merits mention that some pre-existing festivals went through significant transformations in the wake of the political transition of the early-to-mid-1990s, most notably the festival that has to date ambitiously claimed the status of South Africa's "national" arts festival, to which I turn first.

The National Arts Festival (NAF) in Grahamstown, a university town in the predominantly rural Eastern Cape province, has in many respects served as the progenitor and model for arts festivals in South Africa, at least among those who locate themselves within an international, predominantly North Atlantic sphere of reference. Modelled in several respects on the Edinburgh Festival(s) with the distinction between a "Main" (i.e. curated) programme and a "Fringe" (i.e. an open platform patronised directly by, and thus accountable to, the public), the NAF was initially intended to commemorate the linguistic and cultural legacy of the English settlers who were offered farming land in the colonies by the imperial authorities in the early decades of the nineteenth century. As such, upon its founding in 1970, this festival was posited as a largely liberal counterweight to the then hegemonic Afrikaner nationalism, while simultaneously having to reckon with historical complicities of English settlers with the dispossession of the indigenous peoples of the region, as well as the privileging of all so-called Europeans under apartheid policy (for a fuller illustration and account of these dynamics respectively, see Neville and Breitenbach 1991; Pyper [in preparation]). Since at least the early 1990s, the NAF included a jazz sub-festival component, which initially tended to be oriented toward mainstream Euro-American understandings of the music, with a modest representation of such African artists as were able and willing to perform there under the prevailing apartheid regime and international cultural boycotts.

As the NAF came to position itself as what many would have regarded, given its history, to be an unlikely platform for the promulgation of post-apartheid national culture, the jazz component of the festival acquired heightened salience after 1994 as one domain in which the broader festival could be transformed to reflect the aspirations of an avowedly non-racial dispensation. This was reflected in the jazz festival at the NAF attracting dedicated sponsorship at a higher level of scale and prominence,¹⁹ and the expansion of the festival's prestigious annual Young Artist awards, which had hitherto been oriented primarily towards theatre and classical music, to include a category for jazz, bringing with it the commissioning of a high-profile annual jazz festival presentation. Perhaps the most distinctive and consequential aspect of the reimagining of the jazz festival within the NAF in the post-apartheid period has been its reframing within the explicitly educational and professional-developmental framework provided by the National Schools Jazz Festival. For the first half of the festival, the professional artists brought to Grahamstown now serve as teachers at what is in effect a winter jazz camp for students admitted from across the country. This has effectively changed the ethos of much of the event, placing young aspirant and emergent musicians at the centre of the festival, whose exposure to both the performances of, and their pedagogical interactions with, the featured artists tend

to orient the festival away from the strongly transactional nature of some other festivals discussed in this article.

As mentioned above, the most visible platforms for the emergence of a reconstructed, African-oriented festival sphere since the dawn of constitutional democracy in South Africa have entailed a symbolic reclamation of prominent venues in the city centres from which jazz was forcibly removed in the era of high apartheid, while simultaneously being framed by neoliberal national and global discourses characteristic of the early twenty-first century. While festivals like the Standard Bank Jazz Festival in Grahamstown had their origins in aspects of the settler-colonial frontier experience and thus have had to some extent to reinvent themselves in the post-apartheid era, other festivals with a primarily black audience were effectively born with the “new South Africa.”

In 1994, the very year of the country’s celebrated first all-inclusive elections, the city of Johannesburg inaugurated a spring festival called Arts Alive to coincide with what has subsequently come to be known as Heritage Month in South Africa. Despite experiencing various vicissitudes over the ensuing two decades, the one constant feature of this festival has been that it has consistently kicked off with an open-air jazz concert at Zoo Lake, in the heart of one of the city’s historically prestigious—and segregated white—neighbourhoods.²⁰ The first, multi-genre, Arts Alive programme also featured distinct concept-based jazz recitals in prominent jazz venues across the city and included the first of a series of attempts to establish annual international jazz festivals in post-apartheid South Africa. At the time of writing, and looking beyond its jazz programme, the scope and impact of Arts Alive has arguably receded from its prominent role in, for example, hosting the first major post-boycott South African debuts of African musical icons like Salif Keita, Baba Maal, Ismail Lô and many others, and in 2014, twenty years after its introduction, there were calls for the festival to be reimaged or discontinued.

For a variety of reasons, public festivals underwritten by government, whether at local, provincial or national levels, have tended to become rather *ad hoc* affairs, sometimes being presided over by cultural brokers who may have learnt to navigate the bureaucratic tender system without having much of a consistent record within the arts and culture sector (Pyper [in preparation]). Such challenges have extended beyond cities like Johannesburg to the provinces, which in terms of the new South African constitution of 1996 assumed a key mandate in the domain of culture. In 1997 the provincial government of the Free State, a centrally located, land-locked province that had housed one of the most luxurious of the former state theatres, partnered with a channel of the national broadcaster to launch the Mangaung African Cultural Festival (MACUFE) in Bloemfontein. As reported by Johann van Heerden, “Officially dubbed an ‘African cultural festival,’ rather than an ‘arts festival,’ the intention was clear: to stage an event that would recognise and celebrate the indigenous African cultural heritage, and specifically as a balance to the other arts festivals which were perceived to be doing little in that regard” (2011:91–2). Thus born with a view to redressing historical imbalances and avowedly centring African cultural

values and perspectives, the MACUFE festival has been staged annually ever since, despite fluctuating fortunes, and has included a jazz component, though the latter has tended to be dwarfed by an emphasis on hosting high-profile international pop acts.

Also, like MACUFE, an initiative of a provincial government, I have written elsewhere of the so-called “Jazz Africa Heritage” project organised by the government of North-West province in South Africa in 2007 (Pyper 2013:chap. 4). Conceived as part of a ten-day celebration of North American Black History Month in the African “Motherland,” the project (which was subsequently discontinued) aimed to market South Africa, and the North-West province in particular, as a retail tourism destination to the international market, and to African-American tourists in particular. In general, provincial initiatives such as MACUFE and the JAH project have been less successful in their contributions to jazz than festivals positioned at the city level.

Since the early 1990s, at least two attempts to start major jazz festivals in Cape Town had failed, largely because of the economic challenges involved.²¹ Recognising on the one hand the challenges of advancing socio-economic inclusion (given the history recounted above), while simultaneously striving to establish sustainable post-apartheid platforms, I in this section follow the concerns voiced by my interlocutor, which prioritise the strategic and operational questions faced by festival practitioners as they have attempted to confront the legacies of apartheid in real-world contexts of mounting jazz events.

Faced with negative precedents and less than secure emerging models in festivals like Arts Alive and MACUFE, Rashid Lombard, who was soon to become Festival Director of the Cape Town International Jazz Festival, resorted to an alternative approach: leveraging an existing event with an international profile to incubate a new South African festival.²² The event that ended up providing Lombard and his business associates with both a model and an unusually supportive partnering institution was the North Sea Jazz Festival (NSJF) in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. In 1998, Lombard, a veteran photojournalist who has received recognition for his work in documenting apartheid, was working for a local radio station in Cape Town²³ and had relatively recently started an events management company,²⁴ visited the NSJF, for which he received media accreditation as a photographer. Meeting the then director of the NSJF, Theo van den Hoek, Lombard on the spur of the moment asked him to help start a similar festival in Cape Town. Van den Hoek proved receptive to the idea and when Lombard, upon his return to South Africa, offered Van den Hoek two airline tickets and accommodation to visit for the purposes of planning such an initiative, a proposal for a business partnership was consolidated. The NSJF actively invested in the initiative on terms that were favourable to the local partners,²⁵ whereby a new festival would be mounted under the brand of the NSJF—albeit in the South Atlantic.²⁶ A loan agreement from the parent festival was put in place for four years, offering the fledgling festival financing while it established itself. Equally valuable from Lombard’s point of view, through Van den Hoek, he was introduced into a network of international festivals, as well as the International Association of Jazz

Educators and related networks of promoters and artists. For Lombard, this brought instant international credibility. By way of illustration, he points out that the festival was able to host an artist of the stature of Herbie Hancock in its first year; something that in his view would not have been achievable without the support of the international network into which he had been introduced. Lombard deliberately followed international trends, from venue layouts to lighting to programming to where to position the bar counters, which he documented visually as a photographer during his travels and implemented in Cape Town.

Lombard points out, however, that while benefitting from the existing NSJF programming template and business model (notably including multiple stages under one roof in a venue with secure, centralised access control), he was able to “Africanise” the Dutch exemplar. He was given free creative range by his partners from the NSJF to make programming choices, which in his case entailed aiming for a “50/50 split” of local or African vs. international artists, and a much larger educationally oriented workshop programme. Reflecting Lombard’s particular status and networks as a respected jazz photographer, another local feature was the inclusion of a pop-up gallery in the festival venue, featuring a commissioned exhibition of jazz photography. On balance, while drawing explicitly on an existing international model, the transplanting of the NSJF to Cape Town yielded the financial sustainability that had eluded previous festival founders. The event outgrew its initial venue, the Good Hope Centre, after three years, moving to the flagship Cape Town International Convention Centre (CTICC), where it now routinely sells out. Lombard’s company was able to repay the start-up loan after the requisite four years, despite a slump in the value of the local currency in the early 2000s, and to continue under its own brand as the Cape Town International Jazz Festival (CTIJF).

There is an additional sense in which Lombard frames his localisation of the North Sea model: the hospitality that came to serve a central place in the CTIJF visitor experience and business strategy. Drawing on his knowledge of what he describes as the “headspace” of corporates, Lombard and his colleagues created a corporate hospitality “village” on a scale that dwarfed his European models. As Lombard puts it: “South Africans like to be pampered; they dress up; they buy outfits; people save up.” Working from this assumption, Lombard and his partners crafted different hospitality packages for different levels of income, charging up to R12,500 per ticket for those in the top “VIP” categories. This centred on a deliberate business strategy of “using arts & culture to allow people to network.” As Lombard points out, government ministers and private sector executives “love to attend,” and catering for their corporate hospitality agendas offered the festival organisers ways of reducing their dependency on sponsorship for the arts programme on its own.

The CTIJF has come to constitute the most influential model for jazz festivals in post-apartheid South Africa, and has overtly been imitated in Johannesburg’s equivalent event, the annual Joy of Jazz festival (also sponsored by Standard Bank). Also initially conceived by a local black entrepreneur with an initial frame of reference for the local social resonances of this music, Joy of Jazz first emerged as a modest

event in Pretoria in 1998, as a brainchild of conversations between promoter Peter Tladi (T. Musicman) and stalwarts of jazz appreciation societies in surrounding townships and other working-class communities (Ansell 28 September 2014). As veteran jazz journalist Gwen Ansell (*ibid.*) noted when the festival moved in 2014 from its former home base in the Newtown Cultural Precinct in downtown Johannesburg to the up-country equivalent of the CTICC, the Sandton Convention Centre, the festival has travelled a long way, literally and metaphorically, since then. Ansell places it “on the far right of corporate festivals:” relocated to a convention centre in the wealthiest and most fortified part of town, with tickets at R750 for one night, or R1,200 for both, plus travel costs, parking, food and drink.²⁷ There are trade-offs when such festivals reposition themselves as elite corporate affairs, and in the absence of deliberate strategies being put in place to advance social inclusivity and to maximise their educational potential, they tend to drift free from their historical moorings in the collective experience and sensibilities of the cross-class alliances that incubated jazz in South Africa for much of the previous century. While it seems churlish to underplay the achievement of the likes of the CTIJF and the Joy of Jazz festivals being able to claim a place on an international circuit of prestigious annual events, the terms in which they are framed sometimes come across as remarkably amnesic in relation to the long history of cross-class struggles for cultural autonomy in which jazz festivals have historically played a role, as reviewed above. Without wanting to overstate the case, it seems striking that official press releases such as the following entirely normalise a neoliberal, economic rationale for these events, which arguably submerge or even erase the artistic and socio-political valances that jazz has pertinently served in South Africa historically:

Johannesburg is expected to reap substantial economic benefits thanks to the upcoming Standard Bank Joy of Jazz. Standard Bank Joy of Jazz—which will attract more than 30,000 fans when it takes place at the Sandton Convention Centre from September 25 to 27—injects approximately R600 million annually into the Gauteng economy. Building up to the weekend of the Standard Bank Joy of Jazz festival, the “City of Gold” becomes the centre of the jazz universe attracting a cross-spectrum of individuals and corporates, including top-level executives from a variety of companies operating in music, film, TV and digital distribution.²⁸

The strongly quantitative focus of this rhetoric, together with the reference to the “City of Gold,” resonates here with a strategic focus of national government, which since 2011 has highlighted the economic value of the arts (arguably complementing, rather than disregarding, its social, educational and other value dimensions).²⁹ The said press release continues by locating these avowed national imperatives within a discourse of international recognition in which jazz connotes prestige cultural currency, with notable emphasis of the music’s Pan-African appeal:

Over the years, the festival has established itself amongst the Top 10 Jazz events in the world drawing visitors from around South Africa, the African continent and the globe. Media this year comes from a host of African countries as well as the UK and US, including notable titles like *Jazz Times*. (*ibid.*)

Overall, the framing of the festival as a prime tourism event looms large in the remainder of the release, which may be intended to be read alongside other releases detailing the festival's musical content, but which is striking here in its absence:

Johannesburg Tourism Company's Laura Vercueil says hosting events of this magnitude will have direct and positive economic and development impact on the city and "all who work and play within its boundaries."

She says Johannesburg's visitor numbers will again spike later this month with the return of the country's premier jazz festival which will for the next five years be staged at the Sandton Convention Centre.

Vercueil believes the change of venue will accommodate the ever-increasing audience numbers. She says events of this size boost local economic tourism as they attract a high number of domestic, African and international travellers. "Moreover, there is an exchange of professional and intellectual capital and expertise, which comes about as a result of hosting such an event," adds Vercueil. (ibid.)

Considering that Johannesburg has a history of cultural organising among black communities that is now the greater part of a century old, one would hope that this heritage could offer a critical and creative mooring for such events, seeking less to imitate international models and play to corporate interests, than to work consciously within the constraints of a neoliberal global order to which the post-apartheid government has largely accommodated itself, to keep alive the radical, transformative role that this music has, at its best, represented. While festival directors like Lombard and Tladi have on occasion interacted with members of working-class jazz appreciation societies to explore strategies for bridging the socio-economic gap between various audiences, there is not yet evidence that such initiatives have conclusively borne fruit; on the contrary, grassroots jazz audiences remain largely invisible within the ways in which jazz is marketed and discursively framed, where the hand of corporate and government patronage tends to drown out the rich socio-historical resonances of this music in this country.

Conclusion

The historical and contemporary perspectives on South African jazz festivals offered above trace fields of discourse and practice in which earlier claims on cultural autonomy and self-definition articulated in and around jazz music intersect with current economistic-developmental discourses that amount for several commentators to the dominant twenty-first-century mode of governmentality (Peterson, Gavua & Rassool 2015). Both inspired and constrained by these countervailing macro-narratives, individual festival managers like Rashid Lombard have had to develop pragmatic solutions to contemporary cultural-political imperatives as they see them, endeavouring at some levels to advance the liberatory aspects of South African jazz heritage, even as they have had to devote large parts of their time and attention to securing the patronage of new corporate and political elites. Here the contradictions

of the avowed South African transition from apartheid frame and play out on the prominent new public platforms for jazz. Despite and indeed because of the role of this music in animating the social and political imagination, in addition to its artistic manifestations, festivals of the music in contemporary South Africa today perhaps more clearly illustrate the “limits of freedom” to which Marcus refers in the epigraph than the potentially liberatory praxis of the music itself. As to whether a festival praxis might emerge that fuses the aspirationally transformative history recounted above with the promotion of the music today, South Africa perhaps still holds that promise, and it is towards keeping open that potentiality that the critique expressed in this article is offered.

Notes

- 1 See Marcus 2012 [2004]. Thanks for Gwen Ansell for drawing this pertinent article to my attention.
- 2 I discuss these dynamics in other recent writing not limited to jazz (Pyper in preparation:22).
- 3 In this respect, see the “ArtsTrack” research commissioned annually, available from Business and Arts South Africa (BASA), available at www.basa.co.za.
- 4 I do not in this article engage with the literature theorising the public sphere, (which I do in my forthcoming article “Beyond the Settler-Colonial Public Sphere?”). For readers interested in pursuing this in the South African context, I recommend Modisane 2010.
- 5 For an overtly celebratory account of the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown in its formative phases, prior to the formal end of apartheid, see Neville & Breitenbach 1991; for a comparable, if more condensed account (in Afrikaans) of the founding of the Klein Karoo National Arts Festival, see the commemorative publication *KKNK 20: 1995–2014* (Roggenberg 2014).
- 6 Marcus attends primarily to counter-cultural rock music festivals in the U. K. during the 1960s.
- 7 Thus, to cite one brief, diagnostic example: into the post-apartheid period, the jazz component of the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown tended to reflect an ambivalent relationship with specifically South African jazz traditions, and tended to centre on the global, North American-oriented canon, even when it primarily programmed South African artists. This was somewhat mitigated by the festival’s subsequent reoriented educational focus, as discussed below.
- 8 While the franchise had formally been extended to select so-called “non-white” groups in the tricameral parliament since 1983 (specifically to “population groups” defined as “Asian” and “coloured”), the arrangement was widely regarded as collaborationist and of course excluded the majority of South Africans.
- 9 Coplan reports that it is uncertain when this ancient Welsh term for a bardic and choral festival was first applied to African school choir competitions in South Africa, but reports from an interview in 1978 that it dated from the early twentieth century. He reports that in 1931, the pianist and conductor Mark Radebe of Johannesburg and the composer Hamilton Masiza of Kimberley founded the South African Bantu Board of Music (SABBM) to organise provincial *eisteddfodau* among teachers’ choirs. The first such events took place in Port Elizabeth and Johannesburg late in 1931 (Coplan 1985:116; Coplan 2007 [1985]:139). Coplan points out,

moreover, that African participants in this scene were very likely conscious of the association of the *eisteddfod* with the maintenance of Welsh national identity (2007 [1985]:143–4).

- 10 Coplan points out that “[t]he patriarchal bias of this name was no accident, as neither the male black elite nor their white sponsors could envision an inner-city social centre for ‘Bantu’ women, notwithstanding that such women were just as keen to patronize its activities as were men.” (2007 [1985]:138). Coplan’s main historical source on the BMSC is Phillips; for a more condensed account, see Couzens 1982.
- 11 As a multi-purpose venue, the BMSC was home to many cultural events that while not necessarily being central to the development of festival scenes in and beyond Johannesburg, doubtless contributed to the deepening of the city’s jazz culture among members of African communities. For relevant studies in the latter respect, see Couzens 1982 and Ballantine 2012 [1993].
- 12 The involvement of the “United Artists” to whom Coplan here refers appears to be a repeated typographic error, and appears to refer instead to “Union Artists,” i.e. the Union of Southern African Artists, which would be especially significant, since as Coplan elsewhere explains:

Union Artists began as an interracial effort to protect the professional rights of black performers. Under the leadership of clothing workers’ trade unionist Guy Routh and, later, the theatrical personality of Ian Bernhardt, Union Artists successfully arranged royalty payments to Solomon Linda [infamously deprived of royalties for his global hit *Mbube/Wimoweh/The Lion Sleeps Tonight*], Spokes Mashiyane, and Mackay Davashe. They also engineered the boycott by British Equity of all segregated shows in South Africa. After Routh departed for England, Bernhardt emphasised the promotional aspects of Union Artists (...) So began a series of talent contests and small “festivals” leading to the production of the famous *Township Jazz* and *Dorkay Jazz* concert series that began at Selbourne Hall in 1957 and continued until 1966. (Coplan 2007 [1985]:213)
- 13 The Cold Castle Jazz Festivals marked milestone performances by iconic musicians including Philip Thabane (best solo artist in 1961, 1962 and 1963), Kippie Moeketsi with Mackay Davashe’s Jazz Dazzlers (who won a first prize in 1962, presumably for ensemble playing), Chris McGregor and his integrated band the Blue Notes (1963) and Eric Nomvete’s Afro-Jazz composition “Pondo Blues” (Coplan 2007 [1985]:246).
- 14 Ansell has pertinently pointed out (subsequently endorsed by Coplan 2007 [1985]:233) that Dorkay House offered not only formal music training and rehearsal facilities; it enabled informal music exchange that fed the development of the music (Ansell 2004:118).
- 15 One solution at the time, “still used in practice today, lay in hiring a limited number of popular, versatile groups who drew their music from a variety of local and foreign sources” (Coplan 2007 [1985]:246). The purchase of this strategy remains evident today.
- 16 The jazz appreciation societies to which Ansell refers here are the focus of my PhD dissertation (Pyper 2014).
- 17 Coplan makes singular mention of the significant work done in this respect by producer Ray Nkwe, “whose Johannesburg Jazz Appreciation Society and Black Music Foundation attempt to reignite interest in serious jazz and all forms of indigenous African music” (2007 [1985]:201), which Coplan cited from Andersson’s *Music in the Mix*.
- 18 Coplan notes some trade-offs, however, that make festivals only partial reconstructions of the public culture of the Sophiatown era:

The major kind of venue for live performance in the new millennium is the multi-ensemble weekend outdoor festival. In Gauteng, municipal parks from Pretoria's Moretele in the north to Vereeniging's Dickenson in the South resound with the boom of massive sound systems, as a crowded line-up of musical luminaries take the raised stages from midday until the wee hours of the morning. Even when these concerts are referred to as "jazz festivals," the term seems more associated with the prestige of the genre than with the stylistic identity of the actual performances (...) Such occasions have some serious disadvantages for jazz. The picnic atmosphere, where alcohol flows freely and acrid smoke rises from innumerable braai cookers, is inconsistent with serious listening (...) Attendance is entirely drawn from Gauteng's African townships and white patronage is non-existent, depriving the international jazz fraternity of its historically mixed-race club audience. (2007:364)

- 19 When Standard Bank, which had for many years served as the title sponsor of the overall festival, "downgraded" its sponsorship of the event, it simultaneously reinvested significantly in title rights to the jazz festival sub-programme, thereby considerably strengthening it.
- 20 For a critical account of the urban mythmaking with which city developers justify such projects, see Murray 2008. There is extensive scholarly literature on Johannesburg as a site of cultural reinvention and avowed culture-led regeneration that is beyond the scope of this essay.
- 21 Financial challenges include the long haul flights required to reach South Africa, unfavourable exchange rates, and the content mix not being right (interview with Rashid Lombard, as below). Both instances had been initiated by promoters with links abroad. Two American brothers launched the first attempt, while the English pianist Jerry Spencer ventured the second. The latter secured sponsorship from a major international airline and was able to invite the Duke Ellington Big Band, *inter alia*, to Cape Town.
- 22 As Rashid put it to me: "After two failed festivals, how do you create something? Use an existing event." Interview with the author, 27 November 2015.
- 23 The station was then called P4 Radio (now Heart FM). Lombard's assignment to the radio included accompanying some of the station's listeners, suggesting that the NSJF was already known to some in Cape Town. Lombard recalls that this was the second such tour.
- 24 Rashid Lombard was founder and CEO of events company ESP Afrika. He retired from that position in 2015.
- 25 Lombard's company paid a token ZAR1 for the NSIJF "franchise."
- 26 Lombard notes that the Dutch Ambassador at the time, Harry Molenaar, was also instrumental in brokering this partnership.
- 27 The exchange rate has fluctuated in the period under consideration between ZAR 10 and ZAR 15 to one U.S. dollar.
- 28 The policy is available from the Department of Arts & Culture of South Africa at <http://www.gov.za/sites/www.gov.za/files/mzansi%20golden%20economy%2020110411.pdf>.
- 29 "Standard Bank joy of jazz provides a multi-million rand boost to the Gauteng economy." Press release from Total Exposure agency, 19 September 2014.

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