

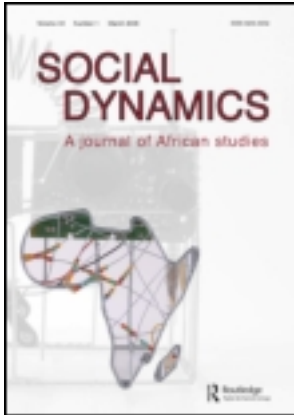
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Contemporary South African Jazz and the Politics of Place

Nishlyn Ramanna¹

Abstract

Drawing on popular music scholarship on music and place, as well as interviews with jazz musicians, scholars, and journalists active on the jazz scenes in Durban and Johannesburg, this article considers how locales are perceived to uniquely influence music-making. Extending Bakhtin's notion of "utterance" to music, it argues that the musical character of recent South African jazz subtly registers demographic, political, economic, and environmental specificities peculiar to contemporary Durban and Johannesburg. It is argued that contemporary South African jazz, as it is experienced by its performers and listeners, may be profitably conceptualised as speaker and addressee of locale.

In lay, journalistic, and scholarly discourse about music, commentary that interlinks notions of music and place is commonplace, even "legion" (Connell and Gibson, 2003: ix). Thus, for Pratt (1990: 30) – and indeed, most consumers of western popular culture – "the sound of accordions can be said to symbolise France, bamboo flutes Japan or China, aboriginal instruments the 'real' Australia, bagpipes Scotland ... and so on." Recalling another familiar set of music/place couplings, Negus (1996: 181) observes that music is "constantly 'placed' as it [is] produced, promoted and listened to, whether as the sound of Strauss's Vienna, Elgar's England ... the sound of merengue from the Dominican Republic or grunge from Seattle."

Recognising that the interrelationships among musical sounds and geographical contexts "raise a number of intriguing but often theoretically vague questions about how the meaning of a place might be created, constructed and conveyed", Negus (*ibid*: 185-6) suggests a two-pronged approach to this problem that explores "(1) how the material conditions of musical production in a specific locality provide the possibilities for a particular sound to be produced and circulated; (2) and how particular instruments and musical elements signify meaning." Implicit in Negus's

dyadic formulation is a potential bi-directionality whereby considerations of place inform our understandings of music, and music, our understandings of place.

Perhaps because material factors and causal relationships are more readily described than the rather complex processes by which musical sounds evoke extra-musical meanings, the first approach is better represented than the second in the music literature. For example, introductory jazz texts will typically discuss that music's beginnings in terms of environmental and social factors peculiar to turn-of-the-century New Orleans. Similarly, world music textbooks may argue that the respectively verdant and semi-arid landscapes of east and southern Africa favoured the development of instrumental music in the former region whilst hindering their development in the latter region.

Not surprisingly – given the reach of apartheid social engineering – examples of the first approach appear in much South African musical scholarship. For example, Allen (1993, 2000), Ballantine (1993), Byerly (1998), Coplan (1985) and Erlmann (1991, 1996) describe the enabling and disabling effects of apartheid legislation on local music-making and show how the aesthetic and social characteristics of various South African musics from *isicathamiya* and *kwela* to Afrikaans popular music and jazz register its influence. On the other hand, I know of no South African research that explicitly theorises notions of musical *sound* as a signifier of place in the local imagination.

This article attempts to move beyond this bias by exploring the interstitial space framed by Negus's questions. Drawing on interviews conducted with musicians based in Durban in the mid-1990s and in Johannesburg and Durban in 2003, I consider contemporary South African jazz as an "addressee" and "speaker" of locality. Through a series of comparisons (mostly between Durban and Johannesburg but also South Africa and elsewhere) my discussion traces ways in which environmental, economic and political factors are perceived to shape, and find expression in music-making activities in different locales.

From Place to Music: Jazz as "Addressee" and "Speaker" of Locality

In mid-1990s Durban, there was a relative scarcity of mainstream jazz performance in the city; rather, groups playing fusions of jazz with local

musics seemed to predominate. Composer, saxophonist and university lecturer in jazz,² Chris Merz, described this situation as follows:

I think Durban is a very strange place. The musicians are all into something else: there's not a real 'down the middle' musician in town. Well there are some, but the ones you hear about – and the ones that are *good* – are the ones that are getting into other areas.

Merz offered the following reasons for this “strange” state of musical affairs:

I could put forward a couple of possibilities: one possibility in Durban is, “Hey there's no work anyway, so we may as well try something. We're not going to get any smaller crowds by trying something that we [would] not ordinarily do.” Another possibility might have to do with the university situation although, it was a very conservative scene when I got here [and] I would have a hard time thinking that the music department has fostered much creative thinking in itself. Another possibility is just the broad variety of cultures that are here. I haven't spent a lot of time in Jo-burg or Cape Town but it seems to me that they're typically a bit more homogeneous than Durban. I think [that] at any time you've got a lot of different kinds of people together, all these cross influences are going to happen and you're gonna come up with some interesting things.

Merz's impromptu analysis neatly affirms Street's assertion that “locality is crucial in structuring the business of making and enjoying music” (1997: 102). According to Street:

Music does not simply 'happen'; there have to be arrangements which enable it to exist. These arrangements can be viewed as the product of a local network or 'scene'. Where no such arrangements or connections exist, there will be silence. What is more, the shape of the local network – where it leads, whom it connects – will affect the type of music being heard and played. What this means is that when people talk of the 'Manchester sound' or the 'Seattle scene', they are not evoking some mystical connection between place and aesthetics – it is not something in the air, or in the 'nature' of the people. It is, in fact, the consequence of particular arrangements which allow music to be made in one way rather than another and which encourage one set of aesthetic judgements to take precedence over another (*ibid*: 101-2).

Articulating a contrasting perspective, Durban jazz pianist Darius Brubeck voiced his scepticism of analyses linking musical outcomes to the defining effects of the kinds of place-specific, economic and demographic factors described by Merz. For Brubeck, Durban's “crossover” jazz scene was entirely authored at the level of individual action. When I asked him to explain why crossover jazz was so prevalent in Durban, he replied:

I think people are consciously looking for very different things to hear: really as simple as that. I've an intellectual bias for wanting to appeal to the cultural atmosphere and so forth but I wouldn't really express that as a critical opinion because I think the musicians themselves know what they're looking for. It's

not something that just happens. I know every member of both groups that you're talking about and I know that, if [they] wanted to, [they] could play [a typical jazz standard like] "Confirmation" [but] have made a choice not to do it. So, it's appealing – but rather intellectually dishonest – to say, "Well, it's because of the concentration and merger of cultures that happen; Durban's a great port" and so on.

While I fully endorse the ideas of Merz and Street (and therefore ultimately disagree with Brubeck's emphasis on the exclusive influence of individual agency on music-making), the latter's remarks constitute an important reminder that localities do not produce music; people do. Nevertheless, as I was reminded by several other interviewees active in the Durban and Johannesburg jazz scenes, localities are *peopled spaces*, which therefore can, and ultimately do enable and constrain different kinds of music-making. For example, Gisele Turner, a self-described "jazz reporter" who writes a weekly column in the arts and entertainment supplement of the Durban-based *Daily News* emphasised the crucial role of individual agency in the development of Durban's lively rock scene:

If you look at the rock scene in Durban, it developed because of some very dedicated media people like Russel Wasserfall [and] Theresa Owen who made it their babies to actually promote [rock].

As host of a series of monthly soirees at her home, Turner herself played an important role in facilitating live jazz performance in Durban in the mid-1990s:

I saw that there were a lot of interesting people writing interesting music and doing interesting things but nobody knew about them and there wasn't a scene basically. Frustrated by the fact that venues in Durban seemed to be a problem, I just opened my house: that seemed to be the most practical thing to do; if I can't find a venue then I'll just use my house. As you know I ran it for two and a half years.

While these instances highlight the significant influence that autonomously-acting individuals can have on music scenes, individual agency is more typically enabled and constrained by more powerful environmental and social energies. As Durban pianist Marion Dall remarks, the influence of these energies may be difficult to account for with any accuracy; nevertheless, they are integral to the spatiotemporal contexts within which daily life unfolds:

Every place does have a specific vibe – even just the *climate* – and I think it all makes a big difference without people even being aware of it. [Durban's] not a go-go-go place, so there's time to feel the leaves, and talk about what the waves look like.

Like Dall, Durban jazz pianist Neil Gonsalves implicitly constructs time and space as intertwined and co-informing entities. As his evocative analogies attest, places have paces and these may colour experience and frame social interaction in important ways, sometimes having a vivid and even visceral impact on the rhythm of individual behaviour:

I can only experience some things from my 'inner workings' if you will. Now I don't know how fast the blood in my veins flows, but I think that in terms of how I react to things, it probably flows [relatively slowly] because I like to take things in my stride: in my own mind, that's when I can work most efficiently.

Just because Jo-burg is so much bigger (and I'm not just talking geographically) somehow things have to happen much faster. There's a lot of the bullshit that just gets cut completely out and you just get down to doing [things] or making [them] happen.

When I go to Jo-burg, as I drive into the city, I feel myself getting ready in a way like you go to war or something [laughing]. It's like changing gears – literally – it is about stepping into that speed. Now I have more than one speed; so when I come back to Durban, as I drive down from Hillcrest into Westville, it's the opposite: I open my window and I *feel* that heat and humidity, that saturation. I breathe. It literally does feel like slipping back into a lower gear.

Gonsalves's interlinking of notions of tempo and place will ring true for most people familiar with Johannesburg and Durban, but while music may represent a useful vantage point from which to read place, the opposite is more difficult. As my exchange with musicologist Christopher Ballantine revealed, trying to specify the influence of general, environmental factors on actual music is a difficult proposition. In answer to my question, "Is there anything that comes to mind – 'offhand,' without my prompting anything specific – about Durban as place with regard to music?" he replied, "It's easier to answer that if you just stopped after the word place."

When geographical locations are conceptualised in political, rather than environmental or social terms, it becomes significantly easier to posit plausible music/place equivalences. As mentioned, apartheid had the effect of politicising most aspects of South African life including music-making and – as composer Deepak Ram suggests – musical patronage sometimes functioned as a form of political performance, through which individuals indirectly expressed acquiescence or resistance to apartheid ideology:

Certain people hang out at different venues but also, you can't separate it from the political situation. I mean, UDW³ stands for something: it's an apartheid-based university originally for the so-called Indian people and although it's not now, people still have that in their minds and that will take long to conquer.

Similarly, many politically conscious performers of colour, like Ram, avoided provincial arts council venues that were supported by the apartheid state:

Lots of people [of colour] still won't go to The Playhouse.⁴ The first time I went to The Playhouse was 1991 and I'm a musician! The first time I listened to an orchestra was in New York at the age of 26 (and here I am hoping to write for them!) But, that shows you, because I wasn't white I couldn't just go to an orchestral concert. I had the financial means but it just didn't feel *right* – at that time – going to the Nico Malan Theatre⁵ or NAPAC.

Physical geography also frames – and thus facilitates or hinders – different kinds of social interaction, and in Ram's view, Durban's multicultural milieu was, in part, made possible by a "compact" topography that tended to facilitate intercultural contact despite the apartheid state's policies of enforced racial separation:

Jo-burg also has a cultural mix; so does Cape Town but [in] Durban, it's visible: the city is smaller than Jo-burg [and] people live closer together. The Group Areas thing didn't *quite* manage to keep people as much apart as was successful in Jo-burg. Jo-burg is a bigger city [and] people were pushed farther apart [in Johannesburg] than they could have been pushed in Durban because of logistical problems. The way people were separated is purely by valleys and hills in Durban. For example, I lived in Lens⁶ for about 29 years of my life and I hardly got to the centre of [Johannesburg]. I've played more in Durban, in every other city in this country, than I've played in Jo-burg. I've given concerts in Jo-burg *proper* - "downtown Jo-burg" as Americans would say – about twice. Getting to Jo-burg from the place I grew up in Lens with one bus every three hours wasn't very easy ... the physical distance was more effective in [keeping different race groups apart in] Jo-burg. Durban is not quite the same: we had group areas but then some melting pot with people in town and that happened across many levels [from] business to artistic things like music.

Neil Gonsalves' and pianist Melvin Peters' recollections of bi-racial social interaction in the early 1970s and 1980s support Ram's description of Durban as a melting pot. Christchurch, Overport, a church to which Peters belongs is in a historically white area, but also very close to the respectively coloured and Indian areas of Sydenham and Asherville. According to Peters, the congregation in the early 1980s was predominantly coloured and Indian. More surprisingly, in Port Shepstone (100km south of Durban) in the early 1970s, Gonsalves and his family were members of a white/Indian congregation:

The church was fairly integrated: I'm saying that not from recollection of having been there but when I look at photographs. [For example], I'll see a photograph [taken] in the church hall on my dad's surprise birthday and well, it's not multiracial but bi-racial in that there are lots of Indian people and lots of white people.

For Christopher Ballantine, the Durban beachfront, (a free, easily accessible, public place of play and relaxation directly adjacent to the city's central business district) has become, in the post-apartheid era, a "post-racial" space – a harbinger of more widespread social interaction⁷ unfettered by race politics:

I think what's special about a zone like the Durban beachfront is its openness, its gentleness, its sociability ... If one has to take seriously the question of how we get beyond thinking about race and how we undermine the notion of race and race thinking ... it seems to me that the Durban beachfront is one of those liberated zones where this can start to happen: *does* in fact start to happen. A lot of people who've been down to the beachfront in the last few years [have] commented on the way people meet each other as humans: rather than meet each other as 'Other', they meet as 'Same'.

Counter-examples (and further examples) abound. On the one hand, Gisele Turner says that many music venues remain racially segregated and that the minority of black people who patronise the wealthier, white-dominated venues are almost inevitably middle-class and private-school educated. On the other hand, Desai (2002) describes how impoverished Indians and Africans in the township of Chatsworth have moved beyond racial differences to fight water and electricity cut-offs often violently imposed upon them by a profiteering city council. "We are not Indian; we are not African: We are the poor," they claim. Still, while there can be no objective "measurement" of racism, non-racialism or post-racialism in a city, on balance, I suggest that Durban *can*, especially with regard to its expressive culture, lay claim to greater levels of inter-racial contact than are found in other areas in the country.

Not surprisingly, this multiculturalism informs Durban's musical landscape too and jazz guitarist Mageshen Naidoo's remarks are revealing of the ways in which the politics of place may find expression in musical sound:

If you're in Durban, even in Chatsworth⁸ with all the Indian people, the African music gets to you with the sound.

When I think about me playing Maskanda guitar, I think, "Where did I learn that? How did I learn all those inflections that can even cause a Black man to say, 'Hey, that's good?'" There again, it's just being in KwaZulu-Natal; being around Black people; experiencing the music, the culture. And, it happened in the "old" days [of apartheid].

Music/place equivalences may also be premised on economically-informed readings of place. Johannesburg trumpeter Marcus Wyatt's respective comparisons of Johannesburg and Cape Town, and South Africa and Europe – as economically and musically different spaces – are a case in point:

[In] Cape Town, they have a lot of small club gigs and a musician down there can be working four times a week playing small gigs which just doesn't happen [in Johannesburg]. There's that whole culture down there (which we don't have up here) of jam sessions and what-what. Because of the [University of Cape Town's jazz programme] and because the recording industry *isn't* based over there, you get a lot of musicians doing projects that are non-commercial [and] more creative.

[In South Africa] there's no public grants like [one finds] in Europe [where] there's so much music but a lot of it, like I say, [is] up it's own arse because they're not struggling.

Similarly, his comments on the increasing commercialisation of post-apartheid South African jazz posit direct correlations between musical culture and economic context:

It's something that we are losing and that worries me. I've sat round with [jazz musicians] in Europe and they said to me, "What's going on? We've heard a lot of the recordings that are coming out of South Africa now in the last few years and it sounds like American smooth jazz." There was a sense that what 'made' South Africa – that put our music on the map and that [earned] us respect out there – was the rawness and the soul and the passion. Now, we've got all these record companies that are trying to make money and because of what the radios are playing, everything has to be matched to American R&B. The records coming out are just smooth – too smooth – and in the long-run, we're actually shooting ourselves in the foot. Gradually, overseas interest is going to die because if anyone really *is* interested in smooth jazz, they may as well just get it in the States.

Guys are just so obsessed with radio play and hits that the whole shape of South African music – since the industry suddenly exploded five years ago – [has] become watered-down.

More typically, however, music-making is affected by an intersection of economic and political factors. As described by Turner, the changing fortunes of two venues – Funky's, a restaurant-bar on the Durban harbour front, and the Rainbow in Pinetown, an industrial centre to the west of the city – foreground the personal, political and economic dynamics that frame music-making:

Funky's changed hands a number of times and it died a million deaths. It was a very sad situation until Nisa Malange got on board as the director. She sits on the National Arts Council committee and she also had access to municipal funds and she recognized the need for there to be some regular jazz things. So she organised sponsorship: at the end of the day that's what [made] it work.

[By the early 1990s,] Ben [Pretorius, the owner of the Rainbow] had lost interest in the music side of the Rainbow. Jazz-for-the-struggle and the-struggle-for-jazz was long since over and the restaurant was doing so well (just by being right next to a taxi rank) he didn't need to put music in on a regular

basis in order to enhance his image or to make any extra money. [The restaurant's subsequent owner] Neil Comfort, who's very interested in music, and was wanting to establish a fresh dimension at the Rainbow started a regular Sunday gig [as well as] a Thursday and Friday gig. Their resident band plays Township jazz, a lot of popular South African standards and a bit of R&B ... [sort of] a 'Radio Metro Band' a with a bit of township thrown in. So, there's Zwakhele in place Thursdays and Friday nights from 5 'o clock in the afternoon: just the little temptation that if somebody's thinking, "Should I go and have a beer at the Rainbow or shouldn't I?" would say, "Hey, let's go have a beer because beers are on special; there is some live music for the next couple of hours; and, I'll still be able to catch my taxi at 7 'o clock and be home in time for dinner." So, the Rainbow has re-established itself as an ignited area.

Likewise, as described by various interviewees, the changing character of the Durban jazz scene over the past ten years reveals how music-making is buffeted and buoyed by a complex confluence of political and economic flows.

In the mid-1990s, there was no venue in Durban that consistently hosted jazz performance on a regular basis like Kippies or the Bassline in Johannesburg, the Village Vanguard in New York, and so on. The Centre for Jazz and Popular Music at the (then) University of Natal had recently inaugurated weekly sun-downer concerts on Wednesday evenings, but because these were only held during term times, during the holidays – when Durban is especially vibrant and abuzz with tourists – things were quiet. As Durban pianist Melvin Peters observed, the jazz scene at the time was thus mostly fragmented, not integrated into the economy, and poorly supported:

The problem is that there is no stable jazz venue. People would go to a venue for a couple of weeks, the venue would close down and then they're left in the lurch. Then another venue starts up and they go to that venue and the same thing happens. The actual jazz scene is very unstable in Durban.

I always believe that if you've got one consistent venue where people know they can go every Sunday or whenever for the whole year, it's great: you'll find them all coming out in their numbers.

While this meant that there was generally very little money to be made from jazz performance, the upside was that jazz musicians were mostly unconstrained by commercial pressures and were, as Chris Merz points out, therefore free to play what they wanted:

Hey there's no work anyway ... we're not going to get any smaller crowds by trying something that we [would] not ordinarily do.

Echoing Merz, Deepak Ram remarked that this economic non-viability helped foster a climate in which aesthetic considerations could take precedence over monetary concerns:

I think the atmosphere of the listeners and the musicians in Durban is not as financially motivated as Jo-burg. It's unfair to say that but I think, [in] Durban, the motivation is a *little* bit more aesthetic.

For Neil Gonsalves, this 'freer' climate ultimately found expression at the level of musical sound:

Jo-burg is recognised as the commercial marketplace of jazz: that's where all the studio musos are; that's where all the work is; but at the same time it means that is sometimes at the cost of being more ambitious creatively. So, you won't find as many 7/4 tunes in Jo-burg as you might for example in Durban. The musicians here aren't under the same kind of pressure as musicians in Jo-burg to make it commercially.

By December 2003, however, when I conducted further interviews with Gonsalves, Peters and other participants on the Durban scene, the situation had changed dramatically. Following the country's re-entry into the global economy, large-scale international investment in the city had seen the erection of a Hilton Hotel and an International Convention Centre (ICC) on the northern edge of the central business district. Partly through Gisele Turner's interventions, Rivets, the ground-floor bar at the Hilton, began hosting weekly jazz performances on Thursdays evenings. Turner explains:

'Rivets' has now been going for six years – so that's Central Business District – five-star hotel, six years, every single Thursday without fail. It's created a sense of firmness (it wasn't fly-by-night: open a club; close a club; change the nature of a club). It just started off as a jazz club and it continued to be a jazz club.

Conferences and corporate events hosted at the International Convention Centre also generated work for jazz musicians. According to Neil Gonsalves:

In Durban at the moment, everyone is doing a lot more corporate gigs than ever before. To an extent that's because you've got the ICC here, and you've [got] that information centre and there's gigs.

Increased media interest in jazz also helped stimulate the market for live jazz performance in the city. Recognising that regular reportage had helped enliven the Durban rock scene, and hoping that the same would hold true for jazz, Gisele Turner persuaded the *Daily News*, in late 1995, to host a weekly jazz column. Her timing was fortuitous in that the image of jazz as a multiracial – but mostly black – music resonated with the politics of the Rainbow nation and later the African renaissance. Moreover, widespread recognition of jazz's popularity with the new regime's political and economic elite bolstered the music's status. Turner explains:

I started writing 'Jazz Eye' about eight years ago. When I approached the newspapers to write a jazz column, they laughed at me and said that there was no jazz, why did I want to write a column? I said, "The reason there's no jazz is

because there's no media pushing; there's nobody there to introduce the people to the musicians; there's nobody pushing any of the venues; there's nobody reviewing any of the jazz events that are happening and it's just going into a limbo." And if you look at the rock scene in Durban, it developed because very dedicated media people like Russel Wasserfall and Theresa Owen made it their babies to promote [rock]. Anyway, I had to trade my very popular vegetarian column which was called 'The Green Kitchen Report' for a jazz column, (they wouldn't let me have two columns as a freelancer which I thought was rather sad) but at the time, I was quite fired up, so I started 'Jazz Eye.' And it was a very long slog: when the university closed for three months, there wasn't a single gig that I could talk about. All the photographs I took were in retrospect: "so-and-so played at the last thing." It was un-tilled ground [but] as time went on, there was growing interest in it and people started to recognise that most important that they were accessing a middle-class black market with jazz. There was a hook in that jazz didn't seem to have too much of a generational thing [and] you could still access youngish people, quite a lot of Coloured and Indian people and even some white people. Suddenly it seemed as though jazz could be the universal language of Durban, a meeting place for everybody. Maskanda was too black; R&B was too you know; Kwaito was this; rock and blues was that. There was an uncomfortable sense that music has been divided into the four [racial] corners and especially as jazz is such a *broad* term for such a *lot* of different music, it seemed to kind of cover the bases and people were getting excited about that.

Jazz musicians have benefited economically from this process in that they are increasingly hired to entertain at business functions hosted by wealthy corporate clients who astutely use jazz's newfound political cachet to claim an appropriately post-apartheid identity for themselves. Turner explains:

There's a sense in the corporate world that they have to 'go African' because so many of their clients are African. Because of the media, jazz is in the air and everybody's saying [in derisive tone], "Oh, we *love* jazz'. They haven't a clue what they're saying and what they're listening to but "We *LOVE* jazz." PR people – who are very quick to catch onto what is trendy so that they can look good in the eyes of their clients and their bosses – will hook into jazz, especially Afro-jazz. And they pay; that's where the money is. If there's been any real spin-off in terms of money for musicians, it's been that the corporates are climbing onto the jazz bandwagon and the musicians are basically able to say what they want to be paid and they're paid well.

Similarly ensnared in an image-centric political economy, Turner suggests that the city's more upmarket restaurants and cafes also started hosting live jazz on a regular basis in order to boost patronage:

So now, we have a situation where people are thinking jazz is the flavour of the month: "Let's start encouraging people to come to our restaurant and not just have a drink and go but linger longer and drink a little bit more and we're gonna create something which they're going to enjoy."

Neil Gonsalves concurs:

Everything is slicker and you open up a restaurant and it's not just a couple of tables and chairs; it's a whole décor and design and music becomes part of that. Guys are literally gigging three or four nights a week.

However, jazz's tighter integration into the economy has exacted a steep price – the occlusion of the mid-1990s climate of creative freedom by a more commercially-driven and aesthetically impoverished scene. As Melvin Peters laments:

It's changed now; we've lost that whole experimental bit. Maybe we'll get it back soon, but right now, there's nothing really interesting going on musically with jazz musicians.

For Turner and Gonsalves, jazz musicians have been corralled into ambience-production and restricted to the more accessible, even Muzak-like, spectra of the jazz rainbow:

Like R&B is the soft side of true gospel, Café jazz is the soft serve of jazz. What it involves, is people who play only well-known tunes and who play them in a very unobtrusive way and who don't take solos or do anything innovative. (Gisele Turner)

These are just background music gigs at Zack's or down at the wharf. But you can't call that jazz if it's background, right? Or is that me being a jazz snob? (Neil Gonsalves)

More worrying, in an almost textbook example of neo-liberalism's monopolistic impetus, the live jazz market in Durban has been cornered by just three bands. This process occurred in three stages. First, the owners of Zack's, a restaurant at the upmarket Musgrave Shopping Centre on the Berea, gained ownership of five other restaurants at Wilson's Wharf – a new multimillion rand restaurant and shopping complex on the Durban harbour-front. Second, these restaurant owners engaged the services of just three bands: playing easy-listening classical music and/or jazz, these bands presented a mini-circuit of Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday performances at three of the restaurants. Finally, these same bands were called on to do gigs at the newly-built casino complex near north beach, at the Trans African Express (a restaurant at the BAT Centre, an arts and crafts complex at the northern edge of Durban harbour) at Rivets and less regularly, at the Wild Coast Sun resort at the southern edge of KwaZulu-Natal. Hampered by transport problems and unreliable equipment, bands from poor township areas, especially, lost these gigs to the better-resourced trio of bands on the Zack's circuit.

Gisele Turner's theatrical telling of these events is incisive, detailed and evocative, and for this reason, I quote her vivid monologue at length:

Zacks decided that they wanted to have jazz: they didn't want jazz that was going to be too innovative or too in your ear because that was going to chase their diners away; they wanted what we would call background jazz. They accessed three or four different bands – who were good musicians – but who were also prepared to put down a commercial bag. Jazz at Musgrave at Zacks started taking off on a Sunday afternoon: outside area, beautiful Durban weather. Wine has become more of a thing than beer; so, 'wine and jazz': people were starting to think they were actually a bit cultured – and the fact that they really didn't know too much about either is neither here nor there. They knew the tunes, and they could say, "Oh Summertime, yay!"

Then the people from Zack's did a coup: they managed to snuffle Wilson's wharf.

I am against monopolies; I made some nasty comments about the need for healthy competition in such an environment but the developers saw, "We've got one person renting; we don't have to collect from five different people; we've got one person talking responsibility; it makes it easy for us. Package deal: right, there you go, over to you." And they started jazz on a Saturday afternoon at Zack's on Wilson's Wharf. Then, they decided that they would also have a semi-classical thing on a Sunday there and *then*, they realised that all they needed to do was have three bands and they could just move them around and it would be a lot less work. So they started up a little circuit and *exactly* the same people play at Zack's in Musgrave as play at Zack's on Wilson's Wharf on Saturday afternoon. Some of those musicians can play a bit of semi-classical music, so they could be used for the Sundays as well. [Thereafter], they started a Wednesday night at Zack's [Musgrave] to try and pick up their clientele in the middle of the week and they use the same bands. So they started a little mini circuit and they never have shifted in the three years that it's been going; the same bands have been playing those [venues]. They give them each two weeks, [then] move them around.

Worse still, is that you get people from the Sun Coast Casino who would think, "Oh Jazz! That's the flavour of the month, so we need to get into [that]." And they pick up the phone and get hold of a PR person and say, "Organise us jazz" and the person at the PR would think, "Oh flip! I don't know any jazz bands." Then they think, "Oh no ... there's a jazz band that plays at Zack's on a Sunday." So they'll push themselves along there on a Sunday afternoon and speak to the jazz musician and say, "Are you available?" The person will [say], "Actually yes: I've got a gap here and I've got a gap there." So they'll say, "Ok fine, you can take that; do you know any other jazz musicians who might be available?" The jazz musician will say, "Yah sure. these are the other guys" and before you know it, those are the jazz musicians that are playing [a] circuit including the Sun Coast Casino.

Meanwhile, add the fact that the Trans African Express is always looking for good musicians that they can rely on, who are going to pitch up, who've got

cars [and own] decent equipment: as it happens, these are the same people that they can rely on 100% to do the job well, deliver the goods, not mess around and give the people a good time. They're not gonna miss their buses from Umlazi [township]; they're not gonna bring clapped-out guitars; they not gonna do a *jam* on stage because they're already so practiced from what they're [constantly] doing, they're basically polished. So they pull in, and they start doing the gigs at Trans African Express.

Now at Rivets there's also that situation [of] "How can we ensure that the quality of the jazz is going to be up to standard [and] we're going to get bands who know what they're doing?" So then we're not just talking about three little venues: we're talking about most of the venues and that starts narrowing things down.

On three interrelated levels, music is indelibly informed by the locales within which it is produced, performed and received. First, music-making is defined by the individuals brought together in a particular locale; importantly, this is a collective process, and the overall character of a given music scene depends on which individuals or groups have the greatest economic and political power to shape it. Second, these individuals' capacity to enable and constrain different kinds of musical activities are, in turn, uniquely impacted upon by political and economic dynamics peculiar to the locales they inhabit. Finally, the political and economic characters of different places are intuitively felt to be framed and coloured by aspects of physical geography. Attempting to trace the flow of influence from environment to political economy to musical sound is admittedly difficult, but as the voices of the various interviewees clearly reveal, geographical context – that spaghetti bowl of personal, political, economic and environmental energies – finds expression, and indeed, powerfully stamps its presence in music-making.

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Notes

- ¹ I would like to thank Christine Lucia for reading earlier drafts of this paper, and for sharing her expert knowledge of Durban's music.
- ² At the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban. Until 2004 this was named the University of Natal.
- ³ University of Durban-Westville, now merged into UKZN
- ⁴ A Theatre complex in the Durban CBD opposite the City Hall; presently privatised, it was owned by the Natal Performing Art Council (NAPAC) which was one of apartheid South Africa's four provincial arts councils. Predictably – given the politics of the time – it was a Eurocentric body dedicated to the presentation of western art music and theatre.
- ⁵ The Cape Performing Arts Council's main theatre.
- ⁶ Lenasia, an "Indian group area" in Johannesburg.
- ⁷ These interactions are rarely consciously sought, but it is safe to say that there exist, on the Durban beachfront, greater levels of interracial coexistence, than might be found in public spaces in Bloemfontein for example.
- ⁸ Chatsworth is the older of Durban's two Indian townships.