

Threads of Sorrow

Insurrections Ensemble

Centre for the Less Good Idea

16 & 17 September 2018

Ali **Ahsan**

Bolton **Brydon**

Bräuninger **Jürgen**

Damodaran **Sumangala**

Dlamini **Sazi**

Ghoshal **Pritam**

Kebede **Mihret**

Khota **Reza**

Makhene **Tlale**

Narayanan **Vivek**

Plaatjies **Lungiswa**

Press **Karen**

Satchi **Sabitha**

Schouw **Tina**

Sitas **Ari**

Vundla **Mandi Poefficient**

This new piece, *Threads of Sorrow*, reflects the confluence of different media and transcontinental conversations about a common postmodern, postcolonial predicament. Against the backdrop of rising fundamentalisms and movements of authoritarian restorations, cartographies of colonialism and human migration, *Threads of Sorrow* is a weaving together of an alternative narrative of the past. In particular, it looks at the role of women in making meaning and expressing creativity despite conditions of violence, servitude and slavery. Thus, *Threads of Lament* includes the colours and textures of survival, of seeking the new: the world may be blind – but ‘we find each other there like mole rats /even under /the lands the harsh wind pummels.’ ‘The woman, ‘trader in hungers / she grew strong’.

The Ensemble comprises the following artists:

Music

Ahsan Ali; Brydon Bolton; Jurgen Brauninger; Sumangala Damodaran; Sazi Dlamini; Pritam Ghoshal; Reza Khota; Tlale Makhene; Lungiswa Plaatjies; Tina Schouw

Words

Mihret Kebede; Vivek Narayanan; Karen Press; Sabitha Satchi; Ari Sitas;
Mandi Poefficient Vundla

Host

Centre for the Less Good Idea

Curator

Centre for the Less Good Idea, South African History On Line (SAHO), and the *Re-Centring AfroAsia: Musical and Human Migrations in the Pre-Colonial Period 700-1500AD* Project at UCT, UWC and Wits.

Ensemble Manager

Tinashe Kushata

Thanks to Astrid Von Kotze, Omar Badsha, Bronwyn Lace, Shruthi Nair, Lethabo Gumede, Hayleigh Evans, Zain Vally, Dave Moyo, and Wesley France.

Threads Of Sorrow Repertoire

Cycle One: Loss & Capture

1. Ukhamba
2. Gone
3. Spring Time
4. Lament
5. Who Are We

Cycle Two: Captivity

1. Diamond Mind
2. Damned Souls
3. Grieving
4. My Tongue Is Burnt
5. Unwritten

6. Muted Anger

Cycle Three: Fragile Hope

1. New Beginnings
2. How To Walk
3. Mother
4. A Future Not Quite Wrested
5. Exile
6. Siyahamba
7. The Journey
8. Fragile Hope

Background

The *Insurrections Ensemble* started from a series of questions: Can you create music that finds a home on both sides of the Indian Ocean, beyond the cliché of ‘fusion’? Are Indian forms compatible with their African Counterparts? Can song and the spoken word in a variety of languages make sense? Is there a soundscape lodged in the tonalities of string instruments that can find a new resonance? In particular, what excited the artists was the relationship between word, voice, expression and sound around shared social and political concerns in India and South Africa. They responded to the disquiet and rebellion in the air as nature fought back at humanity’s betrayal, particularly amongst those who work with nature and its angers - the miners, the farmers, the women out there in the fields and crags. When the lines came, the poems flowed. They asked: Could the poems become songs? Any good musician can improvise around a given scale and without difficulty provide hours on end of guitar, sarod or string-related solos. Could such spontaneity be disciplined into composition and song?

Previous Work

In October 2012, the *Insurrections Ensemble* gathered for two remarkable performances at the Fugard Theatre in Cape Town, directed by Neo

Muyanga and Sumangala Damodaran. At a subsequent consolidating session in the Electro-acoustic studio of the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban, Jürgen Bräuninger started the magic of producing the first CD. This *Eponymous album* (released in 2014) won the NIHSS award for musical composition and arrangement.

Mayihlome/Aawaan followed in 2014, with two performances at the Homecoming Centre of District Six. (the CD was put out in 2015). Again, the music captured the sufferings, struggles, dilemmas of our times in musically revolutionary ways. Conceived as an oratorio, the work drew on the expressive inflections of instruments from both sides of the Indian Ocean – the sarod and sarangi from India; Nguni bows from KwaZulu Natal, and guitar, saxophone, bass and drums, which are ubiquitous to both. Musicologist Angela Impey described the performance as ‘an intimate exploration of hope in the midst of violence and war’. ‘The 7-tracks take us into a world - sometimes recognizably South African, sometimes more generally inferred - that is at once harsh and chaotic, and follow a narrative that moves variously through expressions of fear and defiance to a place of calm and ultimate joy”. Hove concurred: “The atmosphere is rebellious, the words are harsh, the songs allude to defiance.’ Different musical styles are seamlessly woven together and can be African or Indian; after a while, you get lost about what is what.

Then came *The Storming*, in September 2015, and a book/cd published in 2017. Ari Sitas described it as being about ‘the unresolved questions of home and identity; of forced migrations and belonging; of finding a confluence between a musical and a poetic craft that speaks to our predicament’. Looking back, he reflects, ‘Perhaps, it is no longer sugar, spices and spikes that bring us together in the Indian Ocean but a hope that we can find a homing despite the wreckage’. Aditi Humna recalls the performances follows: ‘The ship was rocking, the wooden floor was creaking and the audience could sense the trepidation. An adaption of Aime Cesaire’s *Une Tempete*, itself an adaptation of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, *The Storming* finally unveiled its creative genius at the District Six Homecoming Centre in Cape Town, after months of transcontinental conversations. It brought together an ensemble of poets, musicians from India and South Africa, with artistic influences from the Caribbean and Mauritius, such as Dev Virahsawmy’s *Toofan*, to articulate the postcolonial angst across the Indian Ocean.’

Ahsan

Born in a traditional musical family of Kirana Gharana, a family of legends, Ahsan Ali is the seventh generation of his family. The intensive training he had when he was only seven years old under his father Ustad Asif Ali Khan has stood him in good stead, and he is presently regarded as one of the leading sarangi players of the younger generation. Ahsan Ali is a "A" grade artist from All India Radio Delhi, India. He has been a frequent performer at several music festivals in India and overseas like one of the biggest venues in the world The Sydney Opera House and many more like wise. He has received accolades for his solo performances as well as an accompaniment to many noted vocalists, musicians and tabla players. Ahsan Ali is also a singer and composer at his own Sarangi project called the Ahsan Ali & The Sarangi Sutra. Ahsan Ali has put this instrument on a different scale by infusing it in a variety of genres. He blends this traditional instrument in Jazz, fusion, trance, electronic, Sufi, symphony, and many other styles of music.

Brydon

Brydon is a virtuoso double bassist, music educator, sound artist, curator of music and sound events, composer of contemporary classical music, and a sound designer for dance and theatre performances. Brydon's performing and composing ability, from the romantic to the atonal, made him an essential cog in the distinctive sound of the Insurrections project.

Jürgen

Jürgen was the University of KwaZulu-Natal Music Discipline's art music composition guru and electronics specialist anywhere from Stockhausen to Zappa and African tonalities. He has composed for numerous orchestras, ensembles and electronic media. He has written music for the Siwela Sonke Dance Theatre and for film and was one of the first to put to music some of Ari's early poems. His *Durban Noise and Scraps Works* is a celebrated CD of new South African music.

Sumangala

Singer extraordinaire, composer and economist. Classically trained in Carnatic and Hindustani music, she has spent the last decade collecting the musical compositions of India's anti-colonial and working-class music from a tradition known as the Indian People's Theatre Association. She has sung and composed for the theatre, is currently

composing music for the poetry of Faiz Ahmad Faiz and has completed her book on the aesthetics of the “Radical Impulse”. It was her meeting with South African poet Ari Sitas that started the Indo-African collaboration of Insurrections.

Sazi

Sazi Dlamini is the founder of SKOKIANA, an extended township music performance project active since 1991 involving small and big band ensembles, and for which he composes music reflecting his diverse sources of influence. These include jazz, popular and traditional music of Africa and the world. Primarily a guitarist, he has recorded many original pieces of music employing self-made, indigenous Nguni and other African musical instruments. Besides involvement in all Insurrections incarnations his composition, performance and collaborative credits include Jiwe [2010], Ikhaya on Wooden Shoes [2010], Skokiana [2011], Insurrections: a musical dialogue between South African and Indian artists [2012], Makhafukwe [2013], Mayihlome/Ahwaan [2014], Qob'uqalo [2014], Co-awardee: NIHSS Book, Creative and Digital Collections Award [2016], Recipient: Ethekewini Municipality's Living Legends Award [2016], and Skokiana debut album release *Skokiana* [2017]. Sazi Dlamini is presently a lecturer and music researcher at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban.

Reza

From as early as age ten, Reza has studied rock and classical guitar as well as chord theory. He went on to study classical guitar and improvisation with Faizel Boorany, who fired his enthusiasm for experimental jazz, the classical avant-garde and progressive guitar music. Reza has studied under the likes of David Hewitt, Norwegian guitarist Vergard Lund and the Australian crossover guitarist/composer Helmut Jasbar. Reza has won numerous awards for his exquisite talent and has received master classes from the maestro during his visit to South Africa. Reza has matured into a guitarist with a distinct voice, viewing the guitar as a miniature orchestra. He performs with an unconventional musicality and technical facility that recalls the rich history of the instrument. For more information, please visit www.rezakhota.com.

Lungiswa

Lungiswa Plaatjies was born and raised in Langa, Cape Town where her musical training began in childhood. She started singing at the tender age of 8 and went on to become the lead vocalist of Amampondo. Having toured extensively (through South Africa, far east, Scandinavia, Europe, USA, UK and Canada) she released her first solo album Lungiswa (Ekhaya) and her second "Unonkala" in 2002 followed by Mamelani produced by Don Laka. By this stage she had proven herself as an African music connoisseur, digging deeper into the foundations of African music and Isixhosa dance (Umxhentso). As a multi-instrumentalist, Lungiswa plays mbira, marimbas, djembe, kayomba, uhadi and umrhubhe as well as showcasing her natural singing skills. She has been nominated for various SAMA and KORA awards and has just released her fourth album "Ndiyahamba". It was through her working relationship with the composer Neo Muyanga on two of his operas- the flower of shembe (2012) and the heart of redness (2015). She worked with Amampondo, Ibuyambo, Madala Kunene, Max Lasser swiss guitarist. At the moment she is working with the Insurrections Ensemble and Amathongo.

Tlale

Soweto born, Tlale Makhene is one of South Africa's sought-after percussionists, who moved to Swaziland at a tender age of four and began drumming. He was inspired by the drumbeats and dance rhythms done by his then traditional healer maternal grandmother. Later he returned to his birthplace Soweto, South Africa in 1992 and began studying percussions full time at the FUNDA Center. His professional journey took shape when three Danish drummers known as Drums Across were conducting workshops to scout for talent in South Africa. This afforded him an opportunity to collaborate with John Sund, Yasser Pino, Rune Thorsteinsson (pianist), Carsten D among many others. While in Denmark, he performed with the Copenhagen Rhythmic Conservatory Big Band and taught rhythmic workshops in Copenhagen as part of a cultural exchange program.

He has thus far released two albums, "Ascension of the Enlightened," Which was recorded in Denmark and South Africa and won the MTN SAMA Award in 2005 on the Best Contemporary Jazz Album which was produced by Africa Mkhize, in which his ancestors communicated to him in an intimate manner, which he later translate to a highly appreciated album to his fans. His sophomore album "Swazi Gold," is based on the

music he grew up listening to and that has had a great impact on his career path. This has also afforded him the opportunity to tour some of the SADC countries, such as South Africa, Swaziland and Mozambique to date. Tlale is a versatile musician/performer in his own right, producer, composer, session musician, and tutor. He draws his inspiration from traditional-, world- and jazz-music. There is no 'boxing,' nor hindering this talented gem, who has earned himself the title of "The Groove Master" among his fellow compatriots.

Tina

Tina is a singer, songwriter, guitarist and author who performs extensively locally and internationally. She has produced and staged her own shows, as well as collaborated with various artists on different productions in South Africa. Her music draws on an eclectic blend of styles including, folk, jazz, Latin and contemporary. She grew up in a jazz family. Her father was one of the Cape's legendary guitarists and Tina has been exploring the Khoisan, and Slave roots of music whilst becoming one of the main voices of the mass democratic movement of the 1980s. She has released three CDs one of which is a remarkable children's compilation.

Ari

Poet, dramatist and sociologist. Ari is a vital force in South Africa's cultural life. It was his poetry, especially *Slave Trades*, and its musical texture, that convinced Sumangala that something could be done between the two countries. Ari, often in Delhi, met the innovators of modern Indian music, the sufi philosopher and performer Madan Gopal Singh, the guitarist Susmit Sen, the poets and dramatists of Delhi and threw his energy into this collaboration. He has just launched his new work, *The Vespa Diaries*, in Johannesburg.

Pritam

The sarod's new genius, Pritam has worked extensively with Sufi Musician and singer Madan Gopal Singh in his ChaarYaar ensemble and was key in Sumangala's attempt to rework the musical traditions of India's resistance providing textured renditions of the 1940s and 1950s compositions. He is a remarkable composer in his own right, an improviser and soloist- at home with classical and contemporary music. He is also a part of the experimental Indian-Belgian trio called Kurta Environment.

