

The Sound of Success...

Celebrating creative collaborations

Addressing fellow academics at the National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences (NIHSS) 2016 Doctoral conference recently, the Minister of Higher Education and Training Dr Bonginkosi Ntshangane said: "Achieving academic excellence in humanities and social sciences is crucial for understanding our world."

The need to make sense of our environment, more often than not, required a form of expression that transcended barriers like language, geography and cultural disposition. From the dawn of Human civilization this role was filled by music. The almost supernatural ability to capture our attention, stimulate our senses and connect with us emotionally has positioned this physical manifestation of the internal creative impulse as a major influence in positively changing society.

Six years ago a cross continental conversation began between musicians and poets. Talks of an Indian Ocean collaboration became action and the result of this experiment that spanned across continents, disciplines and genres is the musical genius that is Insurrections.

One of the South African participants that made up the Insurrections ensemble is Dr. Sazi Dlamini. Sazi is a versatile performer and mediator across a regional diversity of music and has a longstanding relationship with the creative contextualisation of indigenous, popular and formal musical performance across cultures and genres of music. He boasts significant collaborative achievements with other international and local musicians and has a passion for the role of music and musical participation within communities. He is an inventor of musical instruments and manufacturer of local traditional ones, which he utilises in the various contexts of musical involvement: performance, composition, film, studio recording, theatre and dance as well as in research and education.

Dr Sazi Dlamini was born in 1966 and matriculated from Amanzimtoti Zulu Training School, formally known as Adams Mission, in 1979. He studied in Durban and graduated from the then

University of Natal with a Diploma in Musical Performance in jazz guitar, followed by a Bachelor in Music degree, specialising in Jazz and Jazz studies in 1995, and a Masters in Ethnomusicology in 1997.

In 2008 Dr Dlamini achieved his PhD in Musicology with research on South African jazz in exile, for his thesis entitled "South African Blue Notes: bebop, mbaqanga, apartheid and the exiling of a musical imagination".

He is currently a research musicologist and lecturer in Music History and Culture at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, this (ethno) musicologist, composer and performer has recorded more than fifty original pieces. Sunday Independent caught up with the Durban-based talent to find out more about him and how he felt about the ensembles' latest accolade, winning the Best Musical Composition/Arrangements Creative Collections - NIHSS Inaugural 2016 Awards: Book, Digital and Creative Collections - Insurrections.

Ladies and gentlemen, I give you Sazi;

Q: Do you think your parents knew what you would be destined for when they named you?

A: No.

Q: The insurrections ensemble is truly a meeting of diverse talent and creativity. What was being a part of that like for you?

A: It was very special. Simultaneously exciting as well as daunting ... Performing a creative collision between languages, ideas, voices and sounds of South Africa and India... For me the primary challenge was to reveal /authenticate affinities between musical traditions of our far flung cultural subcontinents and also situate my own socialisation within the rich diversity of South African musical/cultural orientations. I was excited at perceiving solutions to the challenge not in synthesis (composition) as such, but in affirming commonly-shared sensibilities of a broad and historical musical humanity. This was what I had sensed of the draft poetic texts, and which I sought to compliment using the eclecticist and combination of our



Dr Sazi Dlamini, winner of the Best Musical Composition/Arrangements Creative Collections - NIHSS Inaugural 2016 Awards: Book, Digital and Creative Collections - Insurrections.

"remotised"/alienated/individualised musicianship... characteristically Insurrection writing collectively interrogate and assert ... a common humanity in the struggles of men and women across time, generations and specific contexts/locations of power/knowledges in contest.

Q: The project was referred to as a mad experiment initially. What went through your mind when you decided to be a part of it and more importantly why did you believe that it would work?

A: That could have been some person else's comment...

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Hearing it for the first time in ferment in the imagination of its instigators ... It sounded like a most sane stab at madness ... or a mad clawing towards sanity... stuff of artists and everyone with responsibility for

it was for most audiences...cool. Believing? Yes I believed in the project's challenges, and that it in itself was work... doing work... making work do some important work... in a creative spirit engaging uniquely collectively with universal struggles...

Q: Kindly share your most memorable anecdote from the time you spent with the group?

A: I can't seem to recall any specific conversation or happenings but it was always pleasant...lots of laughter, yes... something to smile or laugh about all the time ... whether alone or in the company of

others. Part of my first evening in Delhi was spent at an apartment-home not far from Ambedkar University...shared by Rahul (Ram) and his dad, and Rahul's fiancé... every night scores of suburb's street dogs climbed stairs to the first floor apartment where Rahul's girlfriend would feed them ...the dogs all arrived at the same time. It was normal. Both Rahul and his dad are professors of science and at the time Rahul was bassist and singer with the world-famous Indian-rock group Indian Ocean...

Q: From the instruments that you have made, do you have favourite that you will never part with and why?

A: They are all precious but I am not too attached ... if not copies of known indigenous instruments ...they are either products of my random musical imagination or to made specifically to produce a certain desired sound...as exploration. ...I make or dismantle those I have already made when I need their parts for others... I do not spend a long time making them. I can always make another one, and more often improve on its previous incarnation...

Q: What role if any do the arts play in capturing the spirit of the humanities and as a recognised component of the faculty of Social Sciences?

A: The humanities lend to the sciences crucial qualities of creative imagination and capacities for critical analysis of society, its institutions and systems of power. This foil is necessary to balance the commoditisation and market value underpinning of hard science pursuit. Humanities nurture an important element of human development - and provides critical tools to interrogate social systems and their impacts on successful and equitable human existence. I would like to think of the humanities as the 'conscience' of the sciences, without whose astute critical mirror, the world (however materially achieved) might not like what it sees of itself. The humanities are the senses of society...

Q: You are passionate about the preservation and promotion of indigenous music. In a time when "globalisation" is the order of the day, why is it important to retain a sense of individuality musically?

A: Yes I am concerned about validation of indigenous and originary senses of music, but more about locating a context

for sustained and resilient traditions of music-making. I am not sure about the retention of musical individuality in the context of subjugated shared identities - where cultures have use for their creative elucidation and visionary representation in the global community of cultures. Essentially music presents important way of demonstrating humanly-shared values of diverse people across the world.

Q: What impact did winning the best Musical Composition/Arrangement at the 2016 NIHSS Awards have on the group? Another ground-breaking project perhaps?

A: Very affirming. Of the project's creative ethos and its' potential to interrogate meaningfully some of the burning issues and vexed discourses of human entanglement...

Q: What's next for the Insurrection Ensemble?

A: The ensemble was not able to excavate and explore all of the possibilities of its resources, the persuasions and passions of its individual and collaborative constituent... there is lot of room to expand, to perform the project on stages where it has not been yet esp India, from where the project's significant membership emanated, and perhaps important music festivals such as House on Fire, Sauti Busara, Zakifo... It is really up to creative vision, and opportunity... unavailability of enabling funds is always challenging to planning for the future...

Q: What are your thoughts and feelings around the newly adopted 90% local content policy?

A: I truly have not given much thought to this ...rather positive ...development for local music. I think not being a commercially recording musician also deflects my attention from material advantages. Of course it is a big step of a cultural emancipation...

So when next faced with a situation or challenge that requires you to believe in attaining success through non conventional methods and thinking despite it being seemingly impossible, draw inspiration from the Insurrections ensemble and soon you too will be dancing to the sound of your own success. **BY: ZUNAID OMAR**

THE ENSEMBLE

Brydon Bolton

Brydon is a virtuoso double bass player. He learnt classical technique at an academy from a Yugoslavian cellist and jazz improvisation from the jazz players in the black and coloured townships surrounding Port Elizabeth. He is also a music educator, sound artist, a curator of music and sound events, composer of contemporary classical music, and a sound designer. He plays for the KwaZulu-Natal Orchestra and is one of the lynchpins of the highly respected Benguela trio.

Jürgen Bräuninger

Jürgen is the University of KwaZulu-Natal Music Discipline's art music composition guru and electronics specialist from Stockhausen to Zappa and African tonalities. He has written music for the Siwela Sonke Dance Theatre and for film. His Durban Noise and Scraps Works is a celebrated CD of new South African music.

Sumangala Damodaran

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.

Sazi Dlamini

Sazi is musicologist, band-leader and guitarist in the jazz-influenced South African township style. He has composed music for documentary television, theatre and film, big band

jazz and numerous original pieces employing self-made indigenous Nguni (bows, drums & flutes) and other African musical instruments.

Pritam Ghosal

Pritam has worked extensively with Sufi Musician and singer Madan Gopal Singh 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.

Tapan Mullick

Tapan has been a major figure in Delhi's music scene playing both classical European and Indian musical compositions for some time. His cello playing and intuitive feel for progressive music saw him collaborate with Sumangala over the years. With his cello and handmade fiddle, he became the natural counterpoint to Brydon's South African bow.

Claude Cozens

Drummer extraordinaire, jazz, fusion and experimental. One of the most exciting rhythm-masters of Cape's jazz scene and a pulse behind Tagore's and the Pan African Station's sounds.

Neo Muyanga

Composer, multi-instrumentalist and singer, Neo has been an institution of South Africa's music scene from the popular to the operatic. A child of a Soweto dynasty of music, he has

Can you create music that can find 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? Insurrections, a collection of twelve compositions, is the product of a poetry-music collaboration that addressed these questions, that was about the relationship between word, voice, expression and sound around shared social and political concerns between India and South Africa. The compositional styles range from the traditional to the avant-garde, from the raga-based and Zulu scale based explorations to electronica.

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been key in the musical avant-garde of Cape Town where he has composed for theatre, film and orchestra. His popular duet Blk Sonshine has been a great success but so has been his Pan African Music Station which features music from the entire African Diaspora.

Vivek Narayanan

Poet and historian, his work has been at the forefront of a new

sensibility of radical poetry, conscious of the West's hip-hop traditions, South Africa's kwaito and diasporic Indian forms.

Malika Ndlovu

Award winning dramatist, playwright, performer and poet, Malika has been active as a curator for poetry festivals and projects. Malika is a founder-member of the Cape Town-based women writers'

collective WEAVE, co-editor of their multi-genre anthology WEAVE's link @ Boiling Point: A selection of 21st Century Black Women's writing from the Southern Tip of Africa.

Pitika Ntuli

The doyen of the African Renaissance Movement in South Africa, a remarkable sculptor and oral poet, a philosopher and a dreamer.



Sabitha TP

Sabitha is one of the powerful new-generation of poets in India having been raised in a creative family of writers and poets. She teaches literature at Delhi University and has been a voice, both in Malayalam and English against class, caste and gender exploitation through her expressionist poetry. Her work, has been about the sensibility of the

struggles of rural India.

Tina Schouw

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.

Ari Sitas

Poet, dramatist and sociologist. Sitas 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.