

## CIRCUITS OF RECOGNITION AND DESIRE IN THE EVOLUTION OF BLACK SOUTH AFRICAN POPULAR MUSIC: THE CAREER OF THE PENNY WHISTLE

*Lara Allen*

Whenever I play a penny whistle record I can almost smell the hot sweat, the stench of stale liquor in the townships and locations. I can almost see the open gutters, the gangsters, the hungry, the train queues, and feel the suffering and the bottled-up emotions of the African. And it captures the Zest of African life. – ‘African Correspondent’ *The Star* July 11, 1963.

For an ‘African correspondent’ writing for a white, Johannesburg-based newspaper in the mid-1960s, the sound of the penny whistle encapsulated an essence of township life: its joys, its sorrows, its struggles and its hopes. After the demise of what became known as *kwela* music in the early 1960s, the penny whistle became iconic of a particular view of township life that has remerged periodically to this day.<sup>1</sup> Despite its recurrent importance in the re-remembering of South African history and culture over the past half century, very little of substance about the penny whistle has been captured for the historical record. It is this gap that I begin to address here.

In this article I trace the use of the penny whistle through various styles of urban black South African popular music, predominantly in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century: these include the penny whistle-and-drum marching bands colloquially known as the ‘scottishes’;<sup>2</sup> penny whistle versions of American blues and big band swing; and the *marabi*-based penny whistle style that came to be called *kwela*. What I am offering here is a synoptic account of the evolution of South African penny whistle musics. Discussion of hermeneutic and ideological questions, as well as the internal construction of the music itself, I address elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> I take this approach partially in response to the constraints regarding the length of a journal article, but more importantly because I wish to argue through this example for continued recognition of the value of detailed empirical, predominantly descriptive research in the historiography of South African music. This is particularly important where little previous academic research has been undertaken, and where vital sources, particularly oral history provided by contemporary commentators, are fast becoming inaccessible: two of the most important informants for this article, Ntemi Piliso and Jake Lerole, have died since my interviews with them; the history offered here would be significantly impoverished without the insights and information that they provided.

The main theoretical issue that rises organically from this biography of the penny whistle’s South African career is the complexity of local-global connections in urban black South African popular music; There exists a fundamental productive tension between the fascination with, and prestige accorded to, the foreign, the other, the artefact from ‘overseas’, and the constant adoption and manipulation of practices from elsewhere to meet local ends. The force behind this tension is competition for cultural power that, in this instance I argue, is revealed in the direction of desire: desire constitutes a fundamental

<sup>1</sup> For example, the penny whistle was central to the sound and image of the 1980s Afro-pop group Mango Groove (for instance, the recent compilation *The Ultimate Collection*, GMVDVD005, 2003), and features on the globally popular album *Graceland*, a 1985 collaboration between Paul Simon and South African musicians (re-released by Warner, 812278904-2). The instrument has also enjoyed guest appearances in the popular music of post apartheid youth, particularly such retro initiatives as the kwaito group Mafikizolo’s 2003 album *Kwela* (CDCOL 8243).

<sup>2</sup> (This is the term used by informants, which denotes a perceived ‘Scottishness’ in the music. A similar word that refers to a dance style – not implied here – is usually spelled ‘schottisches’).

<sup>3</sup> See Allen 1993; 1996; 1999; forthcoming.

recognition of value and therefore of power. I suggest that the power of a musical practice (in this case, the penny whistle) is measured by the extent to which the practice is recognized, desired, and ultimately owned by musicians and audiences. The penny whistle's South African career moreover exemplifies the ongoing dialectical power reversals that characterize cultural production in the country to this day. I propose that this dialectic customarily goes through four phases: attraction – imitation – indigenization – recognition. In each phase the appreciation, or desire, of South African artists and audiences is directed differently, moving along a continuum from power placed entirely with the outside other to the recognition of the other directing desire and appreciation entirely towards the self.

In the first phase, a foreign musical practice or instrument is discovered and admired: local appreciation is entirely directed elsewhere. Quickly South African musicians learn to play the instrument or copy the practice and, to begin with, are admired by their colleagues and audiences for their ability to produce the same results as international artists. In the second phase appreciation is split between the local and the international.

Once the imitated skills are mastered, however, local musicians progress to the third phase in which they use their acquired skills to express their own experience. At this point the musicians' popularity burgeons as audiences recognize themselves and their interests in the music produced. The particular appeal of the resulting product is the expression of local, contemporary, urban identity that does not retrogressively look back to a pre-colonial past or away from the towns to a timeless rural present. The remaining traces of the external practice that provided the initial inspiration ensure that the new, localized form retains the allure of the now and the cachet of a cosmopolitan gloss. What is achieved in this phase is the opposite of cultural imperialism: foreign raw material has been expropriated and pressed into the service of local expressive ends; it has been indigenized. The focus of local appreciation and esteem is entirely on the local.

The process is, however, not over; the final goal has not been achieved. As Jacques Lacan suggests, desire is not ultimately for another, but for another's desire; that is, to be recognized by another: 'man's desire is the desire of the Other' (1998, 235). He derives this idea from Alexandre Kojève's interpretation of Hegel:

Desire is human only if the one desires, not the body, but the Desire of the other ... that is to say, if he wants to be 'desired' or 'loved,' or, rather, 'recognised' in his human value, in his reality as a human individual ... In other words, all human, anthropogenic Desire ... is, finally, a function of the desire for 'recognition' (Kojève 1969, 6-7).

This is why the dialectical power reversal is only complete in the fourth phase when the new indigenized musical practice earns the recognition of international audiences; when those of the culture originally imitated appreciate the new form evolved in South Africa. Ultimate satisfaction and completion of the circuit is only achieved when the self is recognized by another.

I suggest that this dialectic of mutual recognition, and the ongoing alternation of the centre of cultural power, occur easily within the genre of hybrid black South African popular music because of its fundamentally hybrid and constantly changing nature opens it to the process of syncretism. Syncretism, as defined by Melville Herskovits, is 'the tendency to identify those elements in [a] new culture with similar elements in the old one, enabling the persons experiencing the contact to move from one to the other and back again, with psychological ease' (1966, 57-58). This requires reinterpretation, which Herskovits describes as the process 'by which old meanings are ascribed to new elements or by which new values change the cultural significance of old forms' (1948, 119). There were enough similarities between emergent South African styles and those African American styles they aspired towards to stimulate syncretic appropriation, and enough differences in context to

require radical reworking of the meanings of the elements appropriated. Although demonstrated here through the career path of the penny whistle, I argue that this phased circuit of recognition and desire for recognition constituted the fundamental driver in the evolution of urban black popular music throughout the 20<sup>th</sup>-century, and still operates in post-apartheid, 21<sup>st</sup>-century South Africa – in music, but also in cultural production more widely.

### **The use of the penny whistle before 1945: the scottishes**

The penny whistle has been played by black South Africans since the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century. James Mpanza, for instance, reportedly ‘charmed the girls’ with his penny whistle in the early 1900s (*Drum* 9.61); and Charles Hamm maintains that the instrument was ‘brought to South Africa by marching units attached to the British military and imitated by bands of black musicians as early as the 1910s’ (1991, 165). In the late 1930s and early 1940s the marching style and parade costumes of Scots regiments had a marked influence on developing black urban popular culture.<sup>4</sup> Trevor Huddleston reports that on Sunday afternoons in Sophiatown one could witness an ‘all-female band: dressed in tartan kilts, white gloves, bandsman’s staff and accoutrement’ (1956, 133). These ‘Macgregor women’ marched around the location drumming up support for stokvels. Scottish fife-and-drum and pipe-bands were more precisely imitated by groups of black males known as scottishes, playing penny whistles and drums.

One such band, the Phalanyoni Scots, that operated in the Sophiatown and Western Native Township areas, comprised thirty-five penny whistlers and two drummers (*Drum* 4.58). Willard Cele, Jake Lerole, and Ntemi Piliso, who became well known musicians later on, were all at various times members of the Alexandra-based Scottish band originally known as the Alexandra Scots and later as the Alexandra Highlanders. The membership of Scottish bands varied, but usually included fifteen to twenty-five penny whistlers and two to five drummers. Members ranged in age from adolescents to men in their early thirties. The most striking aspect of these bands was their uniform that, as far as cost would allow, simulated exactly the regalia of Scots Pipers: white spats, glengarries and tartan kilts with sporrans.

A further facet of pipe-band performance aspired to by the scottishes was their technique of formation marching. Frederick Maphisa recalls, ‘Do you remember the Scottish could play the drums and turn around, turn around and jump? We used to do that’ (Maphisa Int. 2). Scottishes generally included the percussion required in a pipe band: side drums, snare drums, cymbals and a bass drum. The ability to emulate the exhibitionist drumming techniques, particularly on the bass drum, was held in high regard. Piliso describes a scottishes performance: ‘Then the drummers will demonstrate with the drums and do all these antics, you know – with the big drum’ (Piliso Int.).

Commentators have spent more time describing the dress and movements of Scottish bands than the sounds they created, and it is therefore difficult to ascertain exactly what sort of music was played. It seems that the music was less directly imitative of pipe bands than were other parameters of performance, such as dress and marching style. Informants differ widely on the exact nature of scottishes’ repertoire. Maphisa, for instance, asserts that the scottishes played the same music as the pipe bands they were imitating. He justifies his position by recounting a system that was used to produce a continuous drone: three penny

---

<sup>4</sup> The uniforms and parade marching styles of Scots and other European military bands impacted significantly on popular performance practice throughout southern, central and east Africa, particularly in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century; see Ranger 1975; Gunderson and Barz 2000.



Frederick Maphisa, who was taught by two musicians who had moved to Johannesburg from Bloemfontein, exemplifies those penny whistlers whose performance careers were dominated by participation in scottishes bands. Maphisa, son of a government clerk, was born in 1924 in Doornfontein, Johannesburg. He grew up in Western Native Township where he opted to stay after the rest of his family was removed to Orlando East in 1934. The financial hardship that resulted from his father's retirement and the start of World War II pressured Maphisa into leaving school and starting work, even though he had only reached Standard IV.\* Nevertheless, he successfully ran his own business from 1943 when he got married, eventually producing seven children and seventeen grandchildren. Within his community he was well known in music as well as veteran boxing and soccer circles (Maphisa Ints. 1 and 2). Maphisa started playing penny whistle in 1936, at which time the instrument cost 2s. 6d. Frequently he would walk from Western Native Township into central Johannesburg in order to busk in front of cinema queues and for tourists. His repertoire for these occasions included such songs as 'South of the Border' and 'Rock of Ages'. In 1939 he joined a scottishes band led by Johannes Khumalo, which disbanded in 1945 because of the death of certain core members. In 1958 Maphisa won first prize in a Township Talent competition organized by the Union of Southern African Artists playing 'Lovely Lies' by Mackay Davashe (*Bantu World* 3.3.58). Maphisa abhorred the style of penny whistling that later became known as *kwela*: although he was persuaded to make several recordings in this style he felt it to be an abomination. He asserts that, as a result of the pro-tribal apartheid attitudes that proliferated in the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) at the time, he was frequently told that the music he liked playing was too 'classical and complicated' to be recorded (Maphisa Ints. 1 and 2).

In the late 1930s and early '40s the scottishes marched around the locations and the city of Johannesburg, playing as they marched and stopping to perform for bystanders who threw coins. As wartime inflation increased the basic cost of living by 20% to 50% (Stadler 1979, 21), any means of increasing one's income was vitally important. As Maphisa remembers: 'I could buy myself shoes – I could wear beautifully because of the whistle'. However, Maphisa did earn more from his solitary busking than from playing with the scottishes, since most of the money collected for the latter went to the leader who had provided the capital for the uniforms, drums and some of the penny whistles (Maphisa Int. 1).

Besides the informal activity of street busking, the scottishes were frequently employed to drum up support for stokvels and to play for weddings and other large social gatherings. The highlight of Maphisa's scottishes career was an invitation to open a military camp in Kroonstad in the early years of the Second World War. This was the only occasion on which his band played officially for a racially mixed audience and, particularly in the light of the subsequent deterioration in race relations the acclaim, respect and celebrity treatment they experienced became extremely important to Maphisa (Ints. 1 and 2).

The scottishes experienced contradictory attitudes from the communities that spawned and patronized them. The response of location residents towards members of the scottishes depended largely on whether the expected relationship was one of audience-performers, or fellow members of society. The reaction of location inhabitants to the band as an entity, and to the music they produced, was enthusiastic. Maphisa recalls:

When playing going there, not us only feels the music, [also] our mothers, sisters and aunties, old people. Fathers used to say we musn't come on a certain time because our mothers don't even make food for them. They follow us the whole day. Then when the old man comes nothing has been cooked ... [but] the fathers loved us also (Maphisa Int. 2).

---

\* Not quite completing primary schooling.

The individuals who made up the band, conversely, were regarded as depraved ‘ne’er-do-goods’, and both Maphisa and Piliso suffered chastisement from their parents for associating with people of bad influence. Both, however, confirm that their parents’ concern was not completely misplaced as many members smoked *dagga* and drank to excess. After the Second World War, the popularity of scottishes bands waned. Maphisa played penny whistle only for friends and family, and Piliso was already playing saxophone in a big band that performed swing and African Jazz. Younger penny whistlers, attracted by music with a hotter beat, split into smaller groups to reinterpret the music of American swing bands and *marabi*.

### **Penny whistle blues: Willard Cele and *The Magic Garden***

The first penny whistler to attain widespread fame was Willard Cele, who provided some of the music for *The Magic Garden*, the second South African film to be produced with an entirely black cast.<sup>6</sup> Cele, who grew up in Alexandra township, was twenty when the film was released in 1951. He learnt the penny whistle from his older brother Moses, who was a member of the Alexandra Scots, and later joined this band himself (by then renamed the Alexandra Highlanders). However, Cele found the music of the scottishes old fashioned and, as he explained to a journalist, ‘I only stayed with them for six months ... I wanted to play something hotter, jazzier’ (*Drum* 4.58). Thus Cele turned to solo penny whistle explorations of American rhythm-and-blues, and his pavement performances made him a household name in Alexandra Township long before *The Magic Garden* was released (Macontela Int.; Piliso Int.). Albert Ralulimi describes Cele’s popularity:

The pied piper that started all this was Willard Cele in Alexandra. He used to draw children from 20<sup>th</sup> Avenue and they would follow him up to 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue ... They would dance, following him; some of them would end up getting lost ... He was the first popular penny whistler that existed then ... The cinema owners at times used to get fed up when he is around because just before the show starts, and if Willard is maybe standing or sitting across the street and starts playing his blues on penny whistle, the audience won’t go into the cinema. Instead they will be so very much attracted to what he is doing that the show ends up being delayed ... They used to give him a complementary ticket so that he goes into the cinema before the audience, because otherwise they are going to have a late show (Ralulimi Int. 2).

After hearing Cele playing for a bus queue in Alexandra, Donald Swanson, director of *The Magic Garden*, decided to use Cele’s music in the film’s soundtrack, so launching him as a national role model for aspiring penny whistlers. *The Magic Garden* was filmed on location in Alexandra and apart from the stars the cast consisted of Alexandrians. It was therefore appropriate that the sound track featured music already popular in the township. Aesthetically, Cele’s music was also appropriate for the medium of film to which *The Magic Garden* belongs: a Chaplinesque farce populated by two-dimensional archetypal stereotypes. The plot follows the movements of a sum of money that is magically discovered in the garden of a poor but deserving family. The money was buried there by a thief (played by Tommy Ramokgopa) and the film follows his attempts to steal it back. Cele’s ‘Penny Whistle Boogie’ provides a lively atmosphere for the many chase scenes, and his slightly more melancholy ‘Penny Whistle Blues’ sets the ambiance for situations during which the good guys are temporarily on the losing side. Eventually good triumphs over exploitative shop owners and thieves, the hero (Victor Qwayi) is able to pay *lobola* for his bride (Dolly Rathebe), and all ends happily in a boisterous township wedding. Cele’s recording of ‘Penny Whistle Boogie’ (GB 1123) is a typical boogie-woogie based on a twelve-bar blues progression. It is very fast and has a prominent bass line. ‘Penny Whistle Blues’ (GB 1123), which also follows a twelve-bar blues progression, is slower.

<sup>6</sup> *The Magic Garden* was produced by Swan Film Productions, and directed by Donald Swanson. The first South African film with an all black cast was *Jim Comes to Joburg*, made in 1949. On the nascent South African film industry in the 1950s see Nixon 1994; Davis 1996; Baines 2003.

The inhabitants of Alexandra obtained great satisfaction participating in and watching *The Magic Garden* (Lerole Int. 2), largely for the same reasons Can Themba gives for the reaction to *Jim Comes to Joburg*: '[I]t was a terrific hit. White South Africa gasped to see, in 1949, that the sheer event was dream worthy. Black South Africa thrilled at the idea that black faces, black life, black background could appear on the screen' (Patel 1985, 188). As a medium, film had a strong township following and was powerfully influential within popular culture. The 'favorite bioscopes [of black Johannesburgers] were the Harlem next to Faraday Station, the Casablanca in Malay Camp (Ferreirastown), the Broadway in Fordsburg, the UNO or the Good Hope in Commissioner Street, and the Rio' (Moloi 1987, 72). The première of *The Magic Garden* was held in the latter venue, which is also mentioned in the spoken introduction of the *kwela* number 'Baile Batho' played by Spokes Mashiyane and Lemmy Mabaso (GB 3399). Sophiatown boasted two cinemas: the Picture Palace, also known as the Balanski, and the Odin. According to Don Mattera, the latter was then the largest cinema in Africa, seating 1100 (1987, 74), and was also used as a venue for political meetings and the famous Sophiatown jazz series 'Jazz at the Odin'. Gerhard Kubik asserts that American films influenced both dance styles and popular music all over southern Africa (1969, 91-92; 1979-80, 115). Certainly Ntomi Piliso was inspired to become a jazz musician by the film *Sun Valley Serenade* that featured Glen Miller's orchestra (Piliso Int.).

*The Magic Garden* impacted upon popular township culture, particularly music, more profoundly even than did contemporary American films; a case in point for my argument for the 3<sup>rd</sup> phase of the circuit of recognition and desire: the local appreciation of an indigenized culture. Both primary and secondary sources cite Cele's participation in this film as the birth of the penny whistle craze in Johannesburg's townships.<sup>7</sup> As jazz musician Peter Macontela explains: 'the thing which made penny whistle more popular, it was Willard Cele. Now everybody was playing that song – one song ... After Willard Cele the penny whistle was available easily, everybody was seen to be a penny whistler' (Macontela Int.). As a result of a football injury Cele walked with a pronounced limp (*Ilanga* 17.2.51), which, as Macontela relates, proceeded to influence the performance style of a whole generation of penny whistlers:

You know he was a limping guy, his feet were not equal. He walked like that and we would imitate him ... When we play penny whistle, you do that [sways from side to side] because of Willard Cele. I'll say we thought it was the style, but when we grew up we realized that he was a cripple (Macontela Int.).

Imitation of Cele probably explains why constant bodily movement formed part of the penny whistle performance style of Jake Lerole and particularly Lemmy Mabaso, both of whom grew up in Alexandra, while Spokes Mashiyane, who came from the Northern Transvaal (now Limpopo Province), remained still when he played (*Drum* 12.58; Macontela Int.) The star billing accorded Cele in *The Magic Garden* did much to raise the penny whistle from the status of a toy to that of a recognized musical instrument. In 1951 Cele expressed astonishment at the sudden prestige: 'I'm so surprised – I can't believe it! I never thought I could make up something out of such a small toy instrument' (*Drum* 3.51). In later years, however, after deep disappointment and bitterness induced by the lack of just royalty agreements, Cele bemoaned his lack of financial reward as a star penny whistler, yearning for a more middle class musical occupation: 'I'm sure I would feel happier as a church choir conductor instead of playing the flute' (*Drum* 4.58).

Cele seems not to have made any recordings other than 'Penny Whistle Blues' and 'Penny Whistle Boogie' for *The Magic Garden*. However, since Piliso remembers Cele playing at Troubadour's studios, it is possible Cele made recordings for which he was not credited

<sup>7</sup> Rycroft 1958, 56; Stapelton and May 1987, 188; Gwangwa and van Aurich 1989, 149; Macontela Int.; *Ilanga* 17.2.51; *Bantu World* 8.6.55; *World* 10.3.56; *Drum* 4.58.

(Piliso Int.). He did participate in several live shows after his appearance in *The Magic Garden* including *The African Pageant*, held in Johannesburg's Wembly Stadium in 1951, and the 1956 *Township Jazz* variety shows (*Drum* 4.51; *Golden City Post* 29.7.56, 18.11.56; *World* 4.8.56). The last performance given by Cele that was documented in the media was an 'impromptu session' with the American clarinetist Tony Scott in 1957 (*World* 12.10.57). In 1958 Cele, who unlike most penny whistlers had obtained his Junior Matriculation, was working as a government clerk, but his subsequent whereabouts quickly became unknown to his fellow musicians and by 1990 he was believed to be deceased (*Ilanga* 12.2.51; *World* 1.1.56, 12.4.56; Lerole Int.2; Ralulimi Int. 2).

### **Marabi-style penny whistle music**

Apart from boasting at least one scottishes band and spawning Willard Cele, Alexandra Township also provided a host environment for the evolution of a third style of penny whistle music, one firmly within the *marabi* tradition of urban South African hybrid music. *Marabi* was the first black South African musical style to evolve in the urban residential areas inhabited by the new black working class created by the advent of industrialization in South Africa in the late 19<sup>th</sup>- and early 20<sup>th</sup>-centuries (Coplan 1985, 94-110; Ballantine 1993). Between the 1920s and the 1960s a series of urban working class musical styles developed, all of which merged African musical elements with contemporary popular African American musical styles: roughly chronologically, these styles were *marabi*, *tsaba-tsaba*, African Jazz, *kwela* and *mbaqanga*. As *marabi* was the first style in this series, and because *marabi* is widely considered to have mothered black South African jazz, I refer to this series of styles as the *marabi* tradition.

There exists a fair amount of confusion regarding the categorization of the different musical styles within the *marabi* tradition, partially because two sets of definitive criteria are often applied simultaneously. Musicians often classify styles in terms of their internal musical components. As occurs elsewhere in Africa, however, musical genres are also frequently distinguished primarily in terms of social function (Waterman 1990, 16). Thus Jake Lerole, for instance, explains the technical differences between *kwela* and *marabi* in terms of their internal musical components and, in the same conversation, claims that *kwela* came 'straight from *marabi*, *tsaba-tsaba*. So *kwela* is the same with *marabi*'. He argues that these styles are the same because they fulfilled the same social function: they helped create a convivial atmosphere for dancing and drinking in township shebeens and stokvels. Lerole asserts: 'that's where *kwela* started ... in the stokvels, that's where I was playing for 2s 6d a night' (Lerole Int. 1). From 1948, Lerole played penny whistle in shebeens with a guitar, concertina and homemade percussion instruments. He considers this early *kwela* because the penny whistle is central to the instrumental line up.

Confusion regarding categorization is exacerbated by fluidity regarding naming. As all the styles within the *marabi* tradition evolved organically, on the ground and generally out of the media eye, the relationship between particular styles and terms was also relatively unstable. In fact, the naming of one of the most widely influential styles in the *marabi* tradition is still contentious. At the outset in the 1940s, various terms were employed to refer to the swing-*marabi* style played by local big bands in dance halls. The first term widely applied, simply a description of its musical stylistic components, was African Jazz. The word order of this term implies that the style is Africanized American music, which concurs with Barney Rachabane's explanation of African Jazz as what happens when African musicians try to imitate Americans: 'I try to play like them, but what comes out is real me, real Africa. That's African Jazz: we try to play American jazz but it comes so original' (Rachabane Int.).

Alternative terms used to refer to swung big-band music in the *marabi* tradition include '*majuba*' and '*mbaqanga*'. '*Majuba*' (isiZulu: doves) was the title of one of the Harlem

Swingsters' most popular compositions and for a while was applied as a term to describe other compositions in a similar style. This usage did not, however, last for very long. The more enduring term *mbaqanga*, (isiZulu: staple maize 'bread') was used because, like *mbaqanga* the food, this kind of music was local, widely consumed by township people, and was quick, easy and cheap to make. Also, musicians played such music in order to earn their daily bread. However, I have chosen to use the term African Jazz because the term 'majuba' is no longer widely recognized, and '*mbaqanga*' is commonly used to describe a different style of music that was popular from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s.<sup>8</sup>

Musically there are greater similarities between *kwela* and African Jazz than between *kwela* and *marabi*. This was largely because *kwela* and African Jazz were contemporary styles (they were popular in the 1940s and 1950s) whereas *marabi* enjoyed its heyday in the 1920s and was joined by *tsaba-tsaba* in the 1930s. The main musical difference is that *kwela* and African Jazz are largely swung, whereas *marabi*, *tsaba-tsaba* and 1960s *mbaqanga* are dominated by a driving straight beat. From the late 1940s young aspirant musicians who could not afford band instruments imitated big band music on penny whistle: several of South Africa's jazz saxophonists started their musical careers on this instrument.<sup>9</sup> Such musicians remember copying American swing compositions from records, but assert that local big bands playing African Jazz constituted more influential role models. Performing in shebeens in the late 1940s, Lerole remembers playing renditions of popular swing-band numbers such as 'In the Mood', 'All Over', 'Back Door Blues', 'Chattanooga Choo Choo', 'Choo Choo Ch'Boogie', and 'String of Pearls', but also such local African Jazz numbers as 'Tamatie Sous' (Lerole Int. 1).

Early reviews of penny whistle recordings note the African Jazz influence: one reviewer describes the music of the Orlando Shanty Maxims as 'loosely in the Majuba style' (*Bantu World* 5.8.54), while another reports that a recording by Hamilton Nzimande and his Mad Kids 'opens with a guitar solo which heralds great things in the 'Tamatie-sous' like number. The tune is typical African Traditional jazzed up' (*Bantu World* 8.6.55). The African Jazz legacy is also evident in some of the terms and concepts *kwela* musicians use to refer to aspects of style. Albert Ralulimi, for example, describes the penny whistle backing riffs of *kwela* compositions as if he were talking about big band instrumentation and arrangement:

Me and Spokes Mashiyane and this guy Frans were the first guys who played well phrased tunes on penny whistle with the correct harmony of first, second, first alto, tenor, and we put in a fourth tenor penny whistle ... The influence was mostly from our local bands here like the Jazz Maniacs, and the Alexandra All Stars. They used to play their music with a lot of harmonizing in it. So we thought we can do it on penny whistle (Ralulimi Int. 1).

Although, as a result of Willard Cele's appearance in *The Magic Garden*, the more American end of the American-local stylistic continuum received the attention of the mass media first, penny whistling did not achieve significant mass-market appeal until recordings within the *marabi* tradition were released. In Alexandra the group said to have propagated the latter style was the Alexandra Junior Bright Boys (later the Alexandra Bright Boys) led by Lemmy 'Special' Mabaso. They were popular in Alexandra and on the streets of Johannesburg several years before their first recording in 1956. Piliso explains: 'especially in town they were the craze. They used to demonstrate, you know, they had some sort of choreography that was very attractive' (Piliso Int.). Ralulimi describes the relationship between the Alexandra Junior Bright Boys' music and preceding musical trends:

They were now following the style that was called *marabi* in the townships – played by black big bands that had now started composing music of their own. Like when they started playing things like 'Tamatie Sous' etcetera. So

<sup>8</sup> The most famous exponents of this style are Mahlathini and the Mahotella Queens with the Makhona Tsohle Band.

<sup>9</sup> For example Ntemi Piliso, Barney Rachabane, Teaspoon Ndledle and Peter Macontela.

the Alexandra Bright Boys based their music on that pattern sort of, and then Willard Cele with his blues, he really faded off (Ralulimi Int. 2).

Jake Lerole similarly suggests that the great popularity of the new penny whistle style resulted from the successful integration of what was familiar with what was new:

They [township people] liked that music because it was something different from *tsaba-tsaba*, its flavour was not the same as *marabi* or *tsaba-tsaba*. It's still in the *marabi* idiom, but now this one was, let's say, a modern *marabi* – a modern version of the music (Lerole Int. 2).

Lerole also explains how, at its genesis, ordinary people created *marabi*-based penny whistle music, for ordinary people, dancers and musicians collaborating in communal self-expression:

It came out of people's vibes. To me, myself, it didn't come from me, it came from the people who were dancing about. Those people were making me so happy that I could play. I don't know until I played my heart out, until I could play no more. But that's what they wanted, they really loved it that way (Lerole Int. 1).

Although Willard Cele's blues and boogie-woogie penny whistle recordings were very popular in 1951, the next penny whistle recording session occurred only in mid 1954. According to music archivist Rob Allingham, this was made by the Orlando Tin Whistlers (Silas Ramokhasi on penny whistle and Kenneth Nkosi on guitar), and was produced by Strike Vilakazi. Although South African recording companies had been focusing on developing a market amongst black urban dwellers since the late 1940s, the commercial potential of penny whistle music was not recognized until the release of Spokes Mashiyane's first recordings ('Ace Blues' and 'Kwela Spokes' (Quality TJ 24); 'Skokiaan' and 'Meva' (Quality TJ 21), which were made on October 8, 1954 (Allingham, Int.). These first recordings, particularly 'Ace Blues', sold extremely well (Ibid), and by early 1955 Mashiyane was receiving favourable reviews in the local press. The latter were important as the primary formal mechanism for dissemination of information about releases, although radio took over this function with the introduction of Radio Bantu in the 1960s. During the 1950s black music was only broadcast on South African radio for a few hours a week. Mashiyane's recordings were, however, played regularly by the Southern Rhodesian Broadcasting Corporation, and he soon attained a following all over southern Africa (*Drum* 2.55). As was the case for live penny whistle performance in shebeens and on the streets, Mashiyane's popularity is attributed to his utilization of grassroots musical elements:

Spokes became more popular because he took tunes from the community, something that he felt. He went about stokvels and watching people singing their old songs ... So Spokes improvised the pattern of the type of music that was sung by anybody, or small boys playing on the street and so forth (Ralulimi Int.1).

Spokes Mashiyane was different to most other top penny whistlers in that he did not grow up in the townships. One of eight children, he was born in 1934 in the Vlakfontein-Hammanskraal area of the Transvaal (now Gauteng Province). As he spent most of his boyhood tending his father's cattle, he attended school only as far as Standard III (*Post* 20.1.63; *World* 9.9.64; *Star* 18.2.72). Although I have not found corroborative evidence, it is possible that, as Kubik asserts, Mashiyane started his musical career on reed flutes traditionally played by herd boys in his area (1969, 94). His friend and penny whistling colleague, Albert Ralulimi, asserts that Mashiyane first played a plastic penny whistle, and later a metal one, while still living near Hammanskraal (Ralulimi Int.1).

At the age of eighteen Mashiyane moved to Johannesburg to seek work as a domestic servant. He lived with his aunt in the affluent northern suburb of Parkview where he met guitarist France Pilane. The two formed a duo, and as domestic servants were not permitted to 'make a noise' on their employer's properties, they rehearsed at the Zoo Lake Park during their free time. It was during one of these rehearsals that they were noticed by Strike Vilakazi, then a talent scout for Trutone Records, who subsequently invited Mashiyane and Pilane to record (Ralulimi Ints. 1 and 2). Mashiyane's commercial success precipitated a

search by other record companies for their own penny whistle stars. BB Records, owned by Charles Berman, recorded penny whistler Jerry Ndhlovu (known as Jerrypenny Flute) contemporaneously with Mashiyane's initial releases. Jerrypenny Flute's first recordings, 'Ngiyabonga' and 'Kupela' were issued in November 1954 (*EMI Numerical Catalogue*, 1957), and the first newspaper advertisements appear in January 1955, simultaneously with the earliest advertisements of Mashiyane's recordings (*Drum* 1.55). Although Jerrypenny Flute, accompanied by Jerry Mhlanga on guitar, was recorded by Berman in the BB studios, these recordings were released on EMI's JP label (JP 2017) (Allingham Int.). The search by various record companies for penny whistle stars resulted in a plethora of recordings by penny whistle groups that recorded only once or twice. Of the many aspirant penny whistlers who recorded between 1955 and 1958, very few became regular recording artists.

### **Shebeens, streets, studios and stages: the penny whistle's public platforms**

In the late 1940s and early 1950s penny whistlers honed their skills in local live performance at stokvels parties, in shebeens, and on township streets. By the mid 1950s a critical mass of bands were ready to perform for wider reaching, and better paying, audiences. It was only once penny whistlers started playing in city streets and other public spaces such as parks that recording company talent scouts and stage producers started recognizing their appeal. Once penny whistlers established a firm place for themselves on these two new and more lucrative and prestigious platforms, however, very productive circuits of influence and mutual promotion between street, studio, and stage performance were established.

The musical effects of the inter-relationships between the streets and the studios are most obvious in the changing instrumentation of penny whistle bands. In the early 1950s groups of youngsters busking in the streets played only penny whistles and guitars. Jerrypenny Flute's 'Ngiyabonga' and 'Kupela', recorded by BB Records in November 1954 constitute some of the few recorded examples of how this original street music might have sounded. Although prior to his first recording Spokes Mashiyane played only with Pilane, double bass and drums were added at their first recording session, and this instrumental line up became the norm for penny whistle recordings thereafter.<sup>10</sup> Musicians inspired by recordings subsequently included homemade tea box basses and drums in their penny whistle bands, and these instruments became integral to street performance. By the mid 1950s busking penny whistle bands contained three to eight penny whistlers, one to three guitarists, a drummer, and a bass player. Throughout the 1950s penny whistle bands were a feature of central Johannesburg: one could, for example, be sure to hear *kwela* in the Eloff and President Street area, or near the station (Menell Int.; *Golden City Post* 1.1.59). Bands also commonly operated in Hillbrow, Berea and the northern suburbs. After the 1960s, *kwela* bands grew smaller and started to fade out, tourists providing most of their custom in the latter years (Kubik 1969, 92). Economically, the most important effect of the symbiotic relationship between recorded and live performance was mutual advertising and popularization. The success of recordings inspired the formation of more penny whistle bands and, as Ralulimi explains, street performances popularized the sound and increased sales: 'it was promoted by us the penny whistlers ... I'm sure we should have charged record companies money for doing that work for them' (Ralulimi Int. 1).

The circumstances that led to Ralulimi's graduation from street busker to recording artist typify those of many contemporaneous penny whistlers. Albert Ralulimi grew up in Sibasa

<sup>10</sup> The bass and drums are very soft in Mashiyane's recording of 'Ace Blues', making this the best available example of how he and Pilane may have sounded when they first played together in the Zoo Lake Park.

in the Northern Transvaal (now Limpopo Province), and spent much of his childhood herding cattle and playing the traditional ocarinas and reed flutes of his area. Aged eighteen, he moved to Johannesburg and worked his way from employment as a golf caddy to a telephone operator. In 1954 he became friends with Spokes Mashiyane and they spent many Sunday afternoons together at Zoo Lake where Ralulimi learnt 'the finer points' of penny whistling. In 1956, Ralulimi formed his own band, the Basement Boys, with Specks Ramura, Simon Majassi, and Sam Hlongwane. Busking in front of a Berea hotel one Saturday afternoon, the Basement Boys impressed Roy Evans of Gallo Record Company so much that he invited them to make a recording. Ralulimi recorded for Gallo until 1958 when he signed a contract with Trutone (Ralulimi Ints. 1 and 2).

The second economic impact of the close relationship between street and studio performance relates to income generation for musicians. All the major *kwela* musicians spent a great deal of time, before and during their recording careers, busking in the streets. Speaking to a newspaper reporter on the 1970s, Jake Lerole maintained that busking had been far more lucrative than recording: on the streets takings could be as high as R60 a day (Lerole Int. 2; *Sunday Tribune* 1.9.74). In fact, because of the lack of effective royalty agreements, busking was a mandatory method of financial survival. Unfortunately, from 1958 police harassment of buskers intensified, and eventually perpetual arrests, fines, and physical abuse made the streets an unviable venue for musicians.

While inclusion of penny whistlers in large stage shows did not have the musical impact that recording had had, access to this high profile platform did significantly raise the style's public profile and prestige, and helped consolidate its crossover to white audiences. Further, at least one musician who was to be a top recording artist, Lemmy 'Special' Mabaso, made his breakthrough into the high profile public domain through stage performance. Large variety shows that presented top black performing artists for black and white audiences was a distinctive feature of cultural life in Johannesburg during the 1950s. These shows featured black artists but operated under white management (Coplan 1979, 199-200; 1985). The first show of this type was *Zonk*, organized by Ike Brooks for the entertainment of troops during the Second World War (Coplan 1985, 150-51). It was, however, impresario Alfred Herbert who evolved the variety show concept to its fully-fledged spectacular form through the review *African Jazz and Variety* that he produced virtually every year between 1954 and 1970.

Neither *Zonk* nor *African Jazz and Variety* included penny whistlers in their line up. The first large variety shows to provide a stage for penny whistlers were produced by the Union of Southern African Artists (USAA). This association was formed with funds raised through a farewell concert for the Sophiatown-based clerical activist Father Trevor Huddleston in 1955. This seed money enabled the USAA to hire their own premises at Dorkay House in downtown Johannesburg, from where a series of talent competitions and variety concerts were organized. The USAA first included penny whistlers in their *Township Jazz* show of 1956. Performances were put on at the Johannesburg City Hall, the Selborne Hall, and the University of the Witwatersrand's Great Hall (*Drum* 8.56). The show also toured to Durban (*Golden City Post* 29.7.56, 18.11.56; *World* 4.8.56). Both Willard Cele and Spokes Mashiyane were featured; the latter's backing group including penny whistlers J. Mhlanga, H. Makaya, and Mutstitshu (*World* 23.6.56, 14.7.56; *Drum* 8.56). The USAA also organized a series of shows featuring such artists as Miriam Makeba, the Manhattan Brothers, and the Jazz Dazzlers that toured various parts of the Transvaal late in 1956 and early in 1957. The Solven Whistlers (Ben Nkosi, Peter Macontela, Milton Pitwe and Joseph Matope) toured with this show, and are likely to be the four penny whistlers mentioned by Miriam Makeba in her description of the road accident that resulted in the death of comedian Victor Mkhize (Macontela Int.; Makeba 1988, 59-61).

It was at the memorial show organized by the USAA for Victor Mkhize and Henry Nxumalo (the top journalist known as 'Mr. Drum' who had recently been murdered) that afforded Lemmy 'Special' Mabaso and the Alexandra Junior Bright Boys their break through into stardom (*Golden City Post* 29.7.57; *World* 20.4.57, 24.4.57, 27.4.57, 25.5.57). Newspaper articles report prodigious audience acclaim: 'People are still screaming about the penny whistlers who stole the show' (*Golden City Post* 10.3.57); they 'so mesmerized the audience with their tin whistle music that they had two curtain calls' (*World* 9.3.57). Subsequently Lemmy 'Special' and the Alexandra Junior Bright Boys signed a recording contract with Gallo, swiftly joining Spokes Mashiyane in the penny whistle top league. The group participated in the show titled *Dorkay Jazz* organized by USAA in 1958 (*Golden City Post* 4.5.58), and Mabaso went to London with the musical *King Kong* in 1960. Mabaso's most frequently commended attribute was his showmanship and charisma, largely manifesting in the extraordinary choreography integral to his performance style. Describing a performance, a contemporary journalist asserted: 'Lemmy was in terrific form. He played his instrument with one hand while he pirouetted like a ballerina' (*World* 8.10.58). Macontela elaborates: he holds the penny whistle 'with one finger and jives around. He lies on his back, he kicks, and these [other penny whistlers] keep on backing him. That's how Lemmy became popular in town' (Macontela Int.).

The strategy devised by the USAA to recruit artists for their *Township Jazz* performances was to hold a series of regional talent competitions and minor shows. Some penny whistlers made relatively lasting reputations through this system, others achieved only brief acclaim. In 1958, for example, the Melo-Flutes, led by Frederick Maphisa, won the £100 first prize in the finals of the *Township Talent* music and beauty contest at the Bantu Men's Social Centre (*World*.1.3.58). This duo made their variety show debut on the same occasion as the Alexandra Junior Bright Boys (the USAA's *New Faces of 1958* show held at the Selborne Hall), but the latter went on to a longer and more illustrious career than the former (*Golden City Post* 11.11.57; *World* 10.2.58). Even more attenuated was the career of the Payneville Whistlers, who took part in the *Search for Township Talent and Beauty Show* held in Springs on the East Rand: they received one good review and then disappeared from the public domain (*Golden City Post* 11.11.57).

Both Barney Rachabane and Spokes Mashiyane appeared in the *Township Jazz* shows of 1958 and 1959.<sup>11</sup> The USAA included Rachabane and his group in *Township Jazz* after paying for their tickets from Cape Town where Lofty Adams had abandoned them when his touring show *Africa Sings* failed financially (*Golden City Post* 4.1.59). The culmination of the USAA's variety shows was the musical *King Kong* that opened in 1959. Barney Rachabane and his group played the parts of the penny whistlers in the South African version, and by Lemmy Special in the production that went to London in 1960 (Rachabane Int.; *Post* 12.2.61, 5.3.61; *Drum* 2.61, 4.61).

### **The *kwela* boom**

Penny whistle music sold relatively well to the urban black South African market before the occurrence of what was referred to as the *kwela* boom. However, two events occurred in mid 1958 that alerted South Africans to the value of their home-grown penny whistle music and resulted in a sudden rise in the style's prestige within the country: 'Tom Hark' by Elias and his Zig-Zag Jive Flutes (Columbia YE 164) was used as the theme tune for a programme on British television, subsequently rising high in the British hit parade; and Spokes Mashiyane recorded with American jazz pianist Claude Williamson. The fact that

<sup>11</sup> According to Albert Ralulimi, however, the penny whistler thought to be Mashiyane was, in fact, often Ralulimi who 'stepped in' whenever Mashiyane 'disappeared'. As Mashiyane was, according to Ralulimi, 'a shy guy', this was a relatively common occurrence (Ralulimi Ints. 1 and 2).

international acclaim was required before the style was recognized at home is symptomatic of the continuity of circuits of recognition and desire. Kippie Moeketsi saw it as a result of what he called the overseas complex: a result of what jazz musician Kippie Moeketsi describes as the overseas complex:

[W]e suffer from this complex that whenever a man is from overseas he's the end in life. There's nothing better than a man from overseas! Ha! Ha! You know, *daai gedagte* – that kind of impression. *Monna ga bare o tswa overseas ra mo sheba, man. Ra mo tshaba* – when a man is from overseas, we admire him. We are scared of him! (1987, 75)

Contemporary commentator Bloke Modisane offered a similar explanation: ‘only imported culture has any import in South Africa, so “Tom Hark” had to go great hums in England before we caught on’ (*Golden City Post* 13.7.58).

‘Tom Hark’ had been recorded by Elias Lerole and his Zig-Zag Jive Flutes in October 1956 (*EMI Numerical Catalogue*, 1957), and enjoyed modest South African success for two years when in 1958 the number was used as the theme tune of *The Killing Stones*, a British television series about illicit diamond dealing in South Africa, written by Wolf Mankowitz (*World* 13.8.58), the response of television viewers precipitated a British release of ‘Tom Hark’ (Columbia DB 4109) that did particularly well on the British hit parade (Rycroft 1958, 54; *Golden City Post* 13.7.58; *World* 13.8.58). David Rycroft reports hearing English workmen whistling ‘Tom Hark’ as they laboured in London’s Drury Lane, and asserts that it was a best seller in Britain for over two months (1958, 54; 1959, 29). Furthermore, Ted Heath and his dance band recorded an English cover version (Decca F 11025) in which the ‘Tom Hark’ melody alternates with the Afrikaans folk song ‘Sarie Marais’ (Rycroft 1958, 54). Rycroft remarks that this version lacked the spontaneity of the original; a South African reviewer’s verdict was that ‘it was the African product that grabbed the “cats” by the ears’ (*World* 12.9.59).

The importance of ‘Tom Hark’ in the history of South African penny whistle music is not just that it reached the top of the British Hit Parade and generated a new kind of recognition for the style in South Africa; it is also because it was responsible for the application of the term *kwela* as a stylistic label. There are a number of theories as to how the term *kwela* came to refer to penny whistle music.<sup>12</sup> The most plausible explanation is that *kwela* was originally used as a stylistic label by the British market: reputedly, the term was extracted from the phrase ‘*Daar kom die kwela-kwela*’ that occurs in the spoken introduction to ‘Tom Hark’. In *tsotsi-taal*, the township lingua franca of the day, this phrase means ‘here comes the police van’, but it was understood by English disc jockeys as an announcement of the impending music (Rycroft 1958, 56; Lerole Int. 2). The introduction to ‘Tom Hark’ consists of a tableau about street corner gambling during which the approach of a police van induces the gamblers to pocket their dice and pull out their penny whistles. As Elias Lerole explains:

Then I started to say: ‘Now gentlemen, let’s make little bits of speech before we play this number’. Then the guys, they say: ‘What are we going to say?’ I say: ‘Look – you know all the time when you are in the street we are afraid for these pickup vans?’ Always they used to come and arrest some people, you know? And I say: ‘Now look here, we are going to say: “Gentlemen, let’s play the dice”’. And I throw the money and I check the dice. I throw them, I say, ‘I do!’ Then somebody says: ‘No can do!’ Then I draw again, I say: ‘I do!’ Then they say: ‘Popp!’ and I can grab the money. Then when you are going to grab the money I say: ‘Gentlemen, here comes the *kwela-kwela*. Let’s play our penny whistles to keep the police busy so that they musn’t arrest us’. You see? Then we start to play the flute (Elias Lerole Int.).

Jake Lerole explains that police vans were called *kwela-kwelas* because, ‘if you refuse to board it they say: “*Kwela! Kwela!*” And they kick your backside’ (Lerole Int. 1). Similarly

<sup>12</sup> The most dubious is guitarist Allan Kwela’s claim that he invented the style and that it is named after him (*Daily News* 26.4.89).

Elias Lerole asserts: ‘When you climb up in the *kwela-kwela* everybody’s just pushing: “*Kwela! Kwela!*” You must hurry up and climb up’ (Elias Lerole Int.). In this way there is a connection between police vans and the naming of the penny whistle style. The reverse (retrospective) claim that *kwela-kwela* vans bequeathed their name to penny whistle music because the police incessantly arrested penny whistlers for causing a ‘public disturbance’ (*Golden City Post* 20.1.63; Peterson [n.d.]), is however, unlikely to be correct. This scenario could not have been Elias Lerole’s motivation since during the introduction to ‘Tom Hark’ the actors use penny whistling as a cover to hide their primary, and more illegal, activity of gambling. Further, police harassment of penny whistle buskers did not intensify until 1958, and ‘Tom Hark’ was recorded in 1956.

The theory that attributes the use of the term *kwela* specifically to ‘Tom Hark’s’ success is substantially corroborated by dates. Before June 1958 the term *kwela* is used very little, whereas after June of that year it is used almost exclusively. From this point forward few record reviews of penny whistle music appeared without mentioning the term *kwela*.<sup>13</sup> From 1955 to 1958 penny whistle recordings were categorized on record labels variously as: Tim Whistle Jive; Flute/Tin Whistle; Flutes; Flute Jive; Sax & Flute Jive; Jive; Flutes-Jazz; Flutes-Marabi; Penny Whistle Flute; Penny Whistle; and Flageolet Rock. From the middle of 1958 however such records were classified as Flutes-Kwela, Flute/Penny Whistle Kwela, Flute Kwela, or Penny Whistle Kwela.

One dictionary definition of the word *khwela* in isiZulu is to ‘climb, ascend, mount, mate’ (Doke and Vilakazi 1948). In isiXhosa the same word means to ‘climb, mount, ride, fall upon, attack’ (McLaren 1963). The term *kwela* does not appear in either source. According to Kubik, however, the word *kwela* is used as a verb meaning ‘to climb up’, ‘to raise’, ‘to mount’ in several Southern African languages (1987, 19). Kubik also suggests that the term *kwela* can mean rising in the sense of social emancipation and advancement towards power (Kubik 1969, 92), an interpretation corroborated by Jake Lerole: ‘I had a number which was called “*Kwela Africa*”; meaning Africa climb up! You see? Improve – improve with the music, be at the top’ (Lerole Int. 1). The word *kwela* (or perhaps ‘*khwela*’) was associated with music long before penny whistles became popular. It was often shouted during a number to motivate people to get up and dance (Coplan 1985, 158). In the Jazz Maniacs’ 1939 recording of ‘Tsaba-Tsaba’, for instance, shouts of ‘*kwela!*’ are audible.<sup>14</sup> The instruction, ‘*Kwela!*’ was also used between musicians to induce someone to take a solo (Magwaza Int.). It is in this sense, I suggest, that before 1958 the term *kwela* appeared in song titles coupled with a person’s name. Thus Mashiyane’s 1954 recording ‘Kwela Spokes’ meant climb up Spokes, take a solo Spokes. It is possible that the title ‘Kwela Claude’ (Quality TJ 222) was conceptualized in the same way. Since this last recording achieved success at the same time as ‘Tom Hark’, however, the title ‘Kwela Claude’ is likely to have lent further credence to the new usage of the term *kwela* to mean a particular style of penny whistle music. Incorporated into a title before 1958, then, the meaning of the word *kwela* was likely to be either to rise up and play,<sup>15</sup> or as a reference to a police van.<sup>16</sup> Many of these recordings are played by African Jazz bands rather than penny whistlers, which further suggests that there was no automatic correlation between the term and penny whistles at this time.

<sup>13</sup> For example: *Drum* 8.58, 9.58, 10.58, 11.58, 12.58; *World* 5.5.58, 12.7.58, 27.9.58, 25.10.58; and *Golden City Post* 16.11.58.

<sup>14</sup> Better XU 9, reissued as track 25 on the cassette accompanying Ballantine 1993.

<sup>15</sup> For example: ‘Kwela Joe’ by the African Swingsters (*Bantu World* 8.5.54); ‘Kwela’ by the Shanty City Seven (*Drum* 1.55); and ‘Kwela Biza’ by the Alexandra Shamber Boys (*Drum* 8.56).

<sup>16</sup> For example: ‘Kwela Kwela’ by Contance Piliso (*Drum* 11.55); ‘Kwela Kwela’ by Booyse Gwele and his City Jazz Giants (*Golden City Post* 25.2.56); and ‘Kwela Kwela Blues’ by the Soft Town Bombers (*Golden City Post* 9.9.56).

Whether or not the composition was responsible for the naming of the style, 'Tom Hark's' British success is frequently cited as the birth of *kwela* (*World* 27.9.58; Lerole Int. 2). A press article, for instance, claims that '[b]ecause of "Tom Hark" other records of our artists are enjoying a boom both here and abroad. "Kwela Claude" [and "Sheshisa!"] ... by Spokes Mashiyane and Claude Williamson are fantastic sellers. They've become signature tunes of our commercial radio wires' (*Golden City Post* 13.7.58). South African record companies certainly invested more in *kwela* publicity after 'Tom Hark's' triumph, and attempted to exploit the blossoming international market. Although the tour did not eventually take place because of difficulties attaining passports, there was much coverage in the black press of an EMI plan to promote *kwela* by sending the Lerole penny whistle band to the United Kingdom (*Golden City Post* 13.7.58, 30.11.58). More importantly, record companies started issuing *kwela* on LP records, the format utilized by white South African and foreign markets.<sup>17</sup>

Trutone, the record company to which Spokes Mashiyane was contracted, exploited the commercial potential of 'Tom Hark's' success more effectively than did EMI. Trutone arranged for a collaborative recording session between Mashiyane and the American Claude Williamson Trio who were touring South Africa with the Bud Shank and Bob Cooper's *Jazz West Coast* show. The resulting recordings, 'Kwela Claude' and 'Sheshisa! (Be Alive!)' (Quality TJ 222), were some of the first to be made by a local artist in collaboration with American jazz musicians. This event was hyped by recording company publicity and by the media, turning Mashiyane into an instant celebrity. In fact a year before, clarinetist Tony Scott had recorded with the penny whistle band the Solven Whistlers, led by Ben Nkosi. The collaboration was released on the LP *Something New from Africa* (Decca LK 4292), and received a significant amount of press coverage, but the overall attention earned was nothing like that of the Mashiyane-Williamson project. Trutone's aggressive marketing campaign included billing Mashiyane as 'King Kwela', and printing his picture on record labels; it was the first time a South African record company had lavished such extensive publicity on a black musician. Although it was unprecedented to print comments on record labels of '78s aimed at black consumers, the 'Kwela Claude' label declares: 'The famous American pianist CLAUDE WILLIAMSON, says: "The *Kwela* Rhythm, born in the cradle of jazz, is unlike any other I have played. It could well take its place alongside Calypso and the Samba". The flip side, 'Sheshisa! (Be Alive!)', proclaims: 'The popular whistle player SPOKES MASHIYANE says: "It was a thrilling experience to play *Kwela* with the famous American Claude Williamson Trio. They gave me the inspiration to make 'Sheshisa!' one of the finest records I have ever cut!"' A newspaper advertisement reads along the same lines: 'KING KWELA applauded by the American Stars of Jazz West Coast. Spokes Mashiyane plays *kwela* with the famous American artists "The Claude Williamson Trio" on TJ 222' (*Golden City Post* 18.5.58).

Trutone's marketing strategy of exploiting the American connection as far as possible was most successful. Local journalists became extremely excited about the international connection, indulging in such extravagant claims as: 'Since "Kwela Claude" and "Sheshisa", with Claude Williamson, Spokes has become the most sought after and polished penny whistler in the world' (*Drum* 8.58). Similarly:

Six months ago, we printed a picture of Spokes Mashiyane, he was just one of the Reef's penny whistlers, little known outside. Today, he's known in many lands, and his records are as likely to be sold out in London and New York as they are in any of the towns in the Union ... [Now he is] floating on a flood of international fame (*Drum* 12.58).

<sup>17</sup> For example: 'Tom Hark' was reissued on the LP *Kwela Africa!* and Mashiyane's recordings with Claude Williamson were reissued on the LP *King Kwela* (Rave RMG 1107). *Kwela's* unprecedented crossover into the white South African market is analyzed in Allen (forthcoming).

Such assertions reveal more about the aspirations of reviewers than the reality of musicians' standing, although slightly more tempered commentary reveals a subtle but important rise in prestige achieved by *kwela* for black urban culture within South Africa: '[H]e sky rocketed to fame since recording with Claude Williamson ... White disc jockeys used to credit these sides to Claude Williamson and local artists, but now it's Spokes Mashiyane and Williamson' (*Golden City Post* 15.6.58).

Penny whistle music became known as *kwela* at the zenith of its existence. At the height of its popularity in 1958, however, prime *kwela* exponents were preparing to move on: musicians such as Spokes Mashiyane and Jake Lerole took up the saxophone. At first these musicians played exactly the same style on different instruments, but gradually *kwela* evolved into *mbaqanga*. Besides the personal desire of *kwela* stars to keep ahead, and the need for the popular music industry to keep innovating its product, other forces supported this development. The most important was the radical technical innovation of electric amplification and production of electric instruments, specifically the introduction of the electric guitar and bass guitar. Just in terms of volume, let alone instrumental sonority, penny whistles could not play loud enough to compete with the electric guitars. Saxophones became the norm, initiating the era of sax jive that led into 1960s *mbaqanga*.

Much interesting penny whistle *kwela* continued to be recorded in 1959 and during the early 1960s, and the instrument became popular in other parts of southern and central Africa (Kubik 1979-80). By 1965, however, the penny whistle as a popular South African township instrument was almost obsolete.

## Conclusion

The circuit of attraction – imitation – indigenization – recognition was mobilized a number of times during the penny whistle's South African career. While particular mobilizations, or particular artists, may not have succeeded in following the circuit to completion, the penny whistle itself did reach the highly desired fourth phase, and has won itself a particular place in the nation's historical imagination as a result. The scottishes, for instance, reached the stage of indigenizing their music, if not necessarily their choreography and costumes, but there are no historical traces to suggest that the practice was recognized outside of its immediate cultural context. Within the circuit of desire followed by the penny whistle within popular music, artists like Willard Cele who did not move from the second phase of American blues and boogie to the third phase of *marabi*-inspired music, did not last as high profile performers. However, those musicians who perfected the indigenized style were well placed to attract external admiration, and *kwela* became the first style in the *marabi* tradition to achieve relatively sustained recognition from international and white South African audiences.

The extent of local desire to break through into the fourth and most rewarding stage of the circuit, completing the dialectical shift of the locus of cultural power from the external to the internal, is demonstrated by the euphoric response of contemporary cultural commentators to even the smallest of indications that external recognition had been achieved. Press articles about relatively modest achievements (films starring black South Africans, or collaborations between local and American musicians, for instance) often tended towards the ecstatic. Similarly revealing of the desire for recognition is the alacrity with which local journalists adopt a stylistic label coined by foreign critics, and the shift in their attitude towards penny whistle music from fairly dismissive to overtly hagiographical.

Even in this very early example of the complexity of local-global circuits in South African cultural production, the ironies created by the dialectic of recognition were manifest. Elite,

intellectual journalists, whose personal aspirational identity resided in America were able to resist the ground swing of appreciation for music within the *marabi* tradition from the masses of township dwellers who enjoyed having themselves reflected in this music. They were only able to recognize value in an indigenized product when it was recognized by those whom they admired. These cultural brokers were caught in the paradoxical, looped identity crisis still experienced by South Africa that was then, as it is now, exacerbated by the prejudices of Euro-America towards its peripheries: the orientalism (the desire for an exotic, different Other) most famously exposed analytically by Edward Said (1978), and most obviously demonstrated by the World Music industry. In music shops around the globe South African and other non-Euro-American musics are relegated to the World Music shelves. Full recognition on the part of local selves and global others only occurs once a practice has been indigenized enough to be considered significantly different from the model that inspired it. Only at this point is the 'new' non-Euro-American local mapped as valuable in the world; only at this point is the self recognized by another, and the circuit of desire – Lacan's desire of the other for the self – completed. *Kwela*, then, was the first black South African popular music style to earn the attention of international and local black and white audiences, and also the first South African inhabitant of the yet to be named World Music ghetto.

#### REFERENCES

- Allen, Lara. 1993. Pennywhistle Kwela: A Musical, Historical and Socio-Political Analysis. University of Natal, Durban: unpublished M.Mus. dissertation.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1996. 'Drumbeats, Pennywhistles and All that Jazz': The Relationship between Urban South African Musical Styles and Musical Meaning. *African Music* 7(3), 52-59.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1999. *Kwela: the Structure and Sound of South African Pennywhistle Music*. In *Composing the Music of Africa*, ed. Malcolm Floyd, 225-62. Aldershot: Scolar.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Forthcoming. *Kwela's White Audiences: The Politics of Pleasure and Identification in the Early Apartheid Period*. In *Composing Apartheid: Essays on the Music of Apartheid*, ed. Grant Olwage. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.
- Baines, Gary. 2003. On Location: Narratives of the South African City of the Late 1940s and 1950s in Film and Literature. *South African Historical Journal* 48, 35-46.
- Ballantine, Christopher. 1993. *Marabi Nights: Early South African Jazz and Vaudeville*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.
- Coplan, David. 1979. The African Performer and the Johannesburg Entertainment Industry: The Struggle for African Culture on the Witwatersrand. In *Labour, Townships and Protest: Studies in the Social History of the Witwatersrand*, ed. Belinda Bozzoli, 183-215. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.
- Coplan, David. 1985. In *Township Tonight: South Africa's Black City Music and Theatre*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.
- Davis, Peter. 1996. In *Darkest Hollywood: Exploring the Jungles of Cinema's South Africa*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.
- Doke, Clement and B. W. Vilakazi, B. 1948. *Zulu-English Dictionary*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.
- Gunderson, Frank and Gregory Barz, eds. 2000. *Mashindano! Competitive Music Performance in East Africa*. Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota Publishers.

- Gwangwa, Jonas and Fulco van Aurich. 1989. The Melody of Freedom: A Reflection on Music. In *Culture in Another South Africa*, eds. W. Campschreuer and J. Divendal, 146-59. New York and London: Olive Branch Press.
- Hamm, Charles. 1991. 'The Constant Companion of Man': Separate Development, Radio Bantu and Music. *Popular Music* 10(2), 147-74.
- Herskovits, Melville J. 1966 [1945]. Problem, Method and Theory in Afroamerican Studies. In *The New World Negro*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Herskovits, Melville J. 1948. *Man and His Works: The Science of Cultural Anthropology*. New York: Knopf.
- Huddleston, Trevor. 1956. *Naught for Your Comfort*. London: Collins.
- Kojève, Alexandre. 1969 (1947/1933-39). *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*. London and New York: Basic Books.
- Kubik, Gerhard. 1969. Afrikanische Elemente im Jazz: Jazzelemente in der Popularen [..on a] Musik Afrikas. *Jazzforschung* I, 84-98.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1979-80. Donald Kachamba's Montage Recordings: Aspects of Urban Musical History in Malawi. *African Urban Studies* 6, 89-122.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1987. *Malawian Music: A Framework for Analysis*. Zomba: The Centre for Social Research and the Department of Fine and Performing Arts, University of Malawi.
- Lacan, Jacques, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, transl. Alan Sheridan. 1998. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. London: Norton & Co.
- Makeba, Miriam with James Hall. 1988. *Makeba: My Story*. Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers.
- Mattera, Don. 1987. *Memory is the Weapon*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.
- McLaren, James. 1975 (1963). *A New Concise Xhosa-English Dictionary*. Cape Town: Longman, 4th impression.
- Moeketsi, Kippie. 1987. Roll 'em Morolong. In *Umhlaba Wethu: A Historical Indictment*, ed. Mthobi Mutloatse, Mutloatse Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers.
- Moloi, Godfrey. 1987. *My Life: Volume One*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.
- Nixon, Rob. 1994. *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood: South African Culture and the World Beyond*. New York: Routledge.
- Patel, Essop, ed. 1985. *The World of Can Themba: Selected Writings of the Late Can Themba*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.
- Peterson, Louis. [n.d.] The Evolution of Black Music. Unpublished paper. Compiled by the South African Broadcasting Corporation.
- Ranger, Terence. 1975. *Dance and Society in Eastern Africa 1890-1970: The Beni Ngoma*. London: Heinemann.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1958. The New Town Music of South Africa. *Recorded Folk Music* September/October 1, 54-57.
- Rycroft, David. 1959. African Music in Johannesburg: African and Non-African Features. *International Folk Music Journal* 2, 25-30.
- Said, E. 1978. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon.
- Stadler, Alfred. 1979. Birds in the Cornfield: Squatter Movements in Johannesburg, 1944-47. In *Labour, Townships and Protest: Studies in the Social History of the Witwatersrand*, ed. Belinda Bozzoli, 19-48. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.

Stapelton, Chris and May, Chris. 1987. *African All Stars: The Pop Music of a Continent*. Glasgow: Collins.

Waterman, Christopher Alan. 1990. *Jùjú: A Social History and Ethnography of an African Popular Music*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

### **Discography**

- Cele, Willard. 'Penny Whistle Boogie' Gallotone GB 1123.  
 Cele, Willard. 'Penny Whistle Blues' Gallotone GB 1123.  
 Lerole, Elias. 'Tom Hark' Columbia YE 164.  
 Lerole, Elias. 'Tom Hark' Columbia DB 4109.  
 Lerole, Elias. Played by Ted Heath and his dance band. Decca F 11025.  
 Mashiyane, Spokes. 'Ace Blues' Quality TJ 24,  
 Mashiyane, Spokes. 'Kwela Claude' Quality TJ 222.  
 Mashiyane, Spokes. 'Kwela Spokes' Quality TJ 24.  
 Mashiyane, Spokes. 'Meva' Quality TJ 21.  
 Mashiyane, Spokes. 'Sheshisa! (Be Alive!)' Quality TJ 222.  
 Mashiyane, Spokes. 'Skokiaan' Quality TJ 21.  
 Mashiyane, Spokes and Lemmy Mabaso. 'Baile Batho' (GB 3399).  
 Pennyflute, Jerry. 'Kupela' EMI JP 2017.  
 Pennyflute, Jerry. 'Ngiyabonga' EMI JP 2017.

### **Interviews**

- Allingham, Rob. Author's interview. Johannesburg, 4.5.93.  
 Lerole, Elias. Author's interview. Johannesburg, 16.2.90.  
 Lerole, Jake. Int. 1. Author's interview. Johannesburg, 13.7.90.  
 Lerole, Jake. Int. 2. Author's interview. Durban, 19.5.91.  
 Macontela, Peter. Author's interview. Johannesburg, 13.7.90.  
 Magwaza, Dusi. Author's interview. Durban. 11.3.90.  
 Maphisa, Frederick. Int. 1. Author's interview. Johannesburg, 11.7.90.  
 Maphisa, Frederick. Int. 2. Author's interview. Johannesburg, 13.7.90.  
 Menell, Irene. Author's interview. Johannesburg. 3.9.90.  
 Piliso, Ntemi. Author's interview, Johannesburg. 4.9.90.  
 Rachabane, Barney. Author's interview. Durban, 16.9.89.  
 Ralulimi, Albert. Int. 1. Author's interview, Johannesburg, 12.2.90.  
 Ralulimi, Albert. Int. 2. Author's interview, Johannesburg, 15.7.90.

### SUMMARY

Although a primary aural icon of township life, particularly in the processes of re-remembering the history of black South African urban culture embodied in the contemporary project of nation building and heritage industry, very little is known about the history of the penny whistle in South African popular music. In this article I offer a biography of the penny whistle's South African career including its fundamental role in the Schottisches marching bands, local versions of blues and swing, and the evolution of the marabi-based style that became known as kwela. I suggest that the complexity of local-global interactions exemplified by the evolution of kwela is fundamental to the trajectories of many urban South African styles, and that such interactions are driven by fundamental productive tension between the fascination with the foreign, and the constant cooption of practices from elsewhere to meet local ends. This tension is created by a drive for cultural power that manifests in the extent to which a particular musical practice is recognized, desired, and ultimately owned by musicians and audiences. This process customarily goes through a circuit of four phases: attraction, imitation, indigenisation, and recognition, although not all styles reach the final stages. The fact that kwela was the first township style to complete the circuit partially accounts for its enduring iconic status.