

City jazzman's debut album is a winner

ANDRÉ MANUEL

IT'S OFTEN said that for young people living on the Cape Flats, there are very few positive role models. Say this to Kyle Shepherd, and he'll quickly rattle off a list of musical giants who have served as mentors to him, many of whom are completely overlooked, a kind of cultural amnesia, which has led to the suppression of a sound that is unique to the Cape.

It is within this context, and with this inspiration, that Shepherd's debut album *fineArt* was born. It is an offering of traditional goema, folk jazz and that particular Moravian harmonic church sound, filtered through the life and immense artistry of the young Kyle.

Shepherd has crafted a beautiful album of 11 original compositions and one traditional song, with a delicate and respectful approach to an old sound, gently placing his voice and musical feel into all of the works.

From its very first stroke, starting with the lively, melodic *Zimology* to the infectious rhythmic piano groove on *Dylan Goes to Church* to the upbeat raw and energetic sound of *Die Goema*, then flowing to the quieter side of the album with the haunting take on the traditional song, *Die maan skyn so helder*, sung by Shepherd and subtly accompanied by Buddy Wells on tenor sax, the album grips you by the proverbial heartstrings.

After immersing myself in the sound of *fineArt* for many days before finally penning this piece, I can confidently say this album is definitely one of the better jazz releases to come from this city for a long time.

All of the compositions, says Kyle, have been continuously reworked over the years as he accumulated more knowledge.

"The readiness of the album decided itself," he says. "It happened when it did. An album in an artist's life is just a portrait of that time."

With Buddy Wells on tenor sax, Dylan Tabisher on double bass and Claude Cozens on drums, with Shepherd on piano, alto sax, vocals and percussion, the quartet has the ability to sometimes sound like a big band, with sensitive, quiet



SOLO: Kyle Shepherd will play music from his album *fineArt* at Welgemeend on February 21 at 7.30pm.

moments swelling into big melodies of horn harmonies.

The quartet's offering is coherent and clear, packed with delicate intensity, both wide open and sparse, allowing the emotion to breath through.

That said, it is the sensitive, quiet bits that make this album very special. Nothing is overplayed and all the parts fit perfectly into the arrangements.

The music is uncompromisingly

personal and documents a young artist's journey to musical maturity.

But Shepherd doesn't take the credit all for himself.

"The band was perfect for the album," he says. "Our connection as people was far greater than (what's achieved when) booking session musicians.

"It was like a natural synergy – resulting in a delivery far greater.

"The instruments were mixed in

a way that reinforces the aesthetic of that old sound – the piano and sax upfront with the double bass and drums emerging from somewhere in the background.

"I wanted the sound to be acoustic, honest and sincere and we recorded on a stage at Stellenbosch Conservatory.

"The music needs to speak for itself."

Kyle, despite his youth, has had a long, varied and rich career in

jazz, and has managed to make his mark as one of the best original jazz talents in the city, and is firmly leading the new breed of Cape jazz.

He regards himself as a multi-dimensional artist, exploring all four artistic disciplines – music, words, visuals and movement, in his live stage performances.

The quartet's performance at the packed album launch at the SABC Auditorium was no different, with the show incorporating a visual display, making the live performance more of a theatre experience than just a music show.

"Our aim is to constantly raise the bar of what is achievable.

"Our conviction is very aggressive and very particular as to where, how and how often we play," says Shepherd's business partner, Theo Lawrence.

As a composer and arranger, Shepherd is proving to be one of the chief architects of modern Cape jazz.

I can't really find flaws in the album, except to say that the songs all have a very familiar ring to them and are very distinctly 'Abdullah Ibrahim' in many places.

But that is not necessarily a bad thing. This, however, does not detract from an album that will for sure contribute to the appreciation and preservation of the heritage and culture of the sound we fondly forgot as Cape jazz."

And if you were wondering how the rather academic concept of fine art ties in with the free form of Cape Jazz and a young musician discovering his musical self, you'll find this pearl of wisdom in the liner notes – along with three of Shepherd's poems instead of the regular list of thank-yous:

"*fineArt* is the soil in which the seed of creativity manifests itself. This is music from home. Why wouldn't it be? Why shouldn't it be?"

● *The album is distributed by FineArt Music. It can be found at various independent music outlets across the city, or from the label. See www.kyleshepherd.co.za*

Shepherd will perform solo at Welgemeend, 129 Kloof Street, Gardens on February 21 at 7.30pm.

Tickets are R70. To book, call 072 351 5204, or e-mail info@kyleshepherd.co.za

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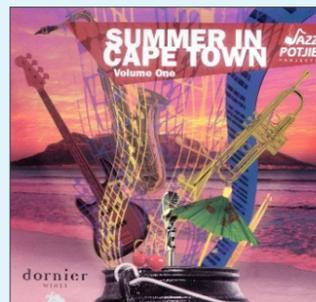
CDs



JONNY COOPER ORCHESTRA - SWING SAFARI (JONNY COOPER)

The Cooper ensemble has established itself as a firm favourite on the big band landscape and here they show off their fine metal. It's something of a South African songbook that aptly celebrates our heritage with clever arrange-

ments that relay much of the joy of tracks such as Nico Carsten's distinctive *Zambezi*, *Ntjilo Ntjilo*, *Bloemfontein Se Rose*, *Pata Pata* and *Mama Thembu's Wedding*. Gloria Bosman breathes life into a zesty version of *Meadowlands* with sideman Timothy Moloi and The African Mamas, while Afrikaans anthem, *Suikerbossie*, is given a military spin. From a capella to punchy big band there's everything from Len Richey blowing sweet kwela on *Penny Whistle Song* to Louis Prima's 1936 swing classic *Sing Sing Sing*, which sees Gene Kruper's drum solo being replaced by McGill Anderson and Godfrey Mcina. Full bodied swinging in the *Skadu Van Ou Tafelberg*.



SUMMER IN CAPE TOWN - VOLUME ONE (JAZZ POTJIE PROJECTS)

A thoroughly beguiling Cape jazz version of *Sunny* makes for a superb opener as Robbie Jansen gives his relaxed best on this groovy evergreen. It's quite a mixed bag which sees Erin Clark snaking through the jazzy score of an accessi-

ble take of *Softly in a Morning Sunrise* with George Werner on piano. Peter Ndala shows off his command of the frets with a bass solo on *Envelope for Penelope*, while Leslie Jooste settles for romance on *L-O-V-E*. Soi Soi Gqeza and Titi Tsira's stomping rendition of *Meadowlands* is seductively mobile, as is a jivey appearance by Zami Mdingi. The Little Giants offer up a Cape Samba tune, and Erika Lundi does her distinctive Tina Turner-ish take with perfect Way on the bandstand. This show of local talent includes bonus tracks by Gramadoelas with *Wat Nie Dood Maak Nie, Maak Vet*. Jansen aptly closes the set with *Bath Street Goema*.

Reviews: Jane Mayne