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JAZZ

Kyle Shepherd: Home Is Where the Music Is

Pianist Abdullah Ibrahim did it. Pianists Bheki Mseleku and Moses Molelekwa both did it. Saxophonist Zim Ngqawana is still doing. And now, hot young pianist and composer Kyle Shepherd is doing it too. Uh, what exactly?

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EVENT DETAILS

When Fri 24 Apr
 Time and Starts at 7.30pm. Admission is R80 or R60 (students and senior
 Extra Info citizens with valid cards). Seating is limited, booking essential.
 Telephone 072 351 5204
 Website <http://www.kyleshepherd.co.za>

VENUE DETAILS

Venue Name Welgemeend
 Address Jan Van Riebeeck High School, Welgemeend Road, Gardens [Map to the venue](#)
 City Cape Town, Western Cape

REVIEW / MILES KEYLOCK

Sidestep the creative cul-de-sac of binary-thought-bound sales pitches such as "commercial", "avant-garde" and "in" and "out" for an idiosyncratically imaginative jazz vision. He may only be 21 years old, but Shepherd's already a prolific composer in his own right. Back in 2005, he won an award for the best original composition in the inaugural FMR/Pick 'n Pay Travel awards. Three years later his fineART Quartet performed a pair of his original compositions in a virtual "Jazz Conversation" with students from the Juilliard Institute for Jazz Studies in New York as part of the Cape Town International Jazz Festival Program. Saxophonist Ron Blake who hosted the Juilliard leg, was impressed by Shepherd's diverse compositions which he found "very fresh, very 21st-century."

Yet while his compositions reflect a distinctly modern approach to improvised music, Shepherd's sound remains rooted in the unique rhythms, harmonies and melodic devices of Cape Town and South Africa.

Don't presume this means he's simply giving the Cape jazz idiom a welcome avant-garde makeover. Shepherd's sound also sidesteps Western stereotypes of swing, hard bop or 'smooth' jazz. Okay, so it's eclectic then? Zim Ngqawana reckons a better term is 'authentic'. In his foreword to Shepherd's debut CD, *fineART* he elucidates: "Authenticity is another word for originality and this is clearly evident in Kyle's compositions, arrangements and improvisation. He has



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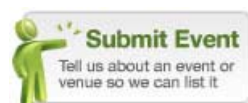
managed to find a balance between the intellect and intuition. Kyle is a meditator and a poet.”

Poet you ask? “My concept is summed up in this poem of mine” says Shepherd says, explaining the album’s title. “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?”

Why indeed. “The type of music I’m playing is not really endorsed that much in Cape Town and South Africa at the moment, which is absurd, you know because we’re playing the sounds of this country” observed Shepherd in an interview with Cape Soundz recently. “We’re playing South African jazz, which strangely enough doesn’t have a big following in terms of Cape Town and South Africa.”

He’s got a point. If master musicians like Abdullah Ibrahim and Hugh Masekela can only rarely afford to showcase their seminal South African jazz sounds to audiences back home then it’s pretty much a slam dunk that our young jazz guns are going to struggle. Maybe so, but if you’ve got the talent, you will find your fan base. As was the case with Shepherd’s CD launch back in January which was sold out well in advance. “My music is a direct representation of my traditions and the lineage of [those] artists that came before me, and I am merely a portrait of their mastery” says Shepherd simply by way of paying homage to Ngqawana, Robbie Jansen, Mccoy Mrubata, Errol Dyers, Louis Moholo and Hilton Schilder who set a proud tradition of artistic mastery and creativity for him and his generation of young musicians to work in.

It’s this ‘Proudly South African’ tradition that audiences can expect to hear in his solo concert this weekend which sees the multi-instrumentalist navigate an impressionistic collage of South African jazz sounds, from slam poetic minimalist re-imaginings of Afrikaans volksliedjies and Muslim calls to prayer, to goema groove deconstructions, tributes to Abdullah Ibrahim, Ngqawana’s philosophy of “Zimology” and more that, as the doyen of South African jazz scribes Gwen Ansell pointed out in Business Day recently: “live in the jazz world but are never imprisoned by it”.



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