

‘We feed off the spirit of the audience’

An ethnographic study of musical storytelling in the
street music of South Africa

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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Abstract

‘We feed off the spirit of the audience’ An ethnographic study of musical storytelling in the street music of South Africa

Street musicians in South Africa work within a challenging macrostructure. In order to maximise their success within this performance environment they must develop strategies to overcome the difficulties that South Africa’s streets present. Various social issues: unemployment, crime, health and xenophobia, have a direct impact on its street musicians, who predominantly come from lower income groups.

The changing tourism industry, which is a vital source of income for these musicians, also presents challenges and opportunities. Together these aspects create a unique street environment within which to examine the role of the musical storyteller, and a performance space that requires the development of specific skills by the street performer to maximise its advantages,

Watching a performance by a group of South African street musicians, telling a complex narrative to their audience, I realised that these performers might not only be fulfilling various social functions, but might also be playing a role in actively performing, and contributing to, genres of South Africa’s traditional musical heritage. I wished to explore this and began to interview selected street performers, and to observe and record their performances.

The boom in the South African tourism industry encourages street musicians to develop styles of performance and musical storytelling that rely heavily on styles of traditional music. However, their repertoires are extensive, and keep altering. There is no pre-established, repeated canon of material to study and draw conclusions from.

I therefore had to approach this study with a different intention. I did not look for single musical narrative items, which I could then dissect and present, but rather I attempted to identify unique aspects of this performance environment and the patterns, or frames of behaviour these cause and inspire.

This was achieved by many viewings and recordings of different performances by each case study, as well as interviews and informal conversations. I extensively explored these and finally drew conclusions. Individual case studies were interesting in that they highlighted aspects of this complicated and interrelated performance

environment. They were also representative of varying responses to the restrictions and circumstances inherent in this environment.

Key areas of exploration of this study are:

- The particular environment that *South African streets* provide for their street performers.
- How this difficult environment forces street performers to *maximise their success*.
- The *collaborative* atmosphere and *musically inclusive* behaviours between performers that this inspires.
- The streets' *lack of containment*, both physically and socially, of both performer and his audience, and hence the fluidity of the audience and the performer's necessary *flexibility*.
- The *immediacy* of the feedback received and hence the performers' use of *framing* techniques.

My conclusions are that many South African street musicians did have a social role to play, and that their performance environment encouraged them to play an active role in the preservation of, and contribution to, South Africa's musical heritage.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Goodman's introduction

Observations surrounding a performance by Goodman (solo performer: singer and guitarist) He is sitting at the edge of Greenmarket Square in Cape Town. It is early morning on 22 September 2007. The weather is clear and windy, without being warm.

It was cold. A bitter wind was running between the buildings and whistling around the corners. In front of him was a tin box, attached to a chain trailing back and around the upturned crate that he sat on. On his lap was the belly of a battered guitar. It was upright and turned towards him, the sound hole positioned just a few inches in front of his mouth. He was curled into his instrument as if shielding himself from the wind. The plectrum scratching the fingerboard made a harsh chunk-a-chunk against the few remaining strings. It was a thin, uninspiring sound, but his voice was beautiful; rasping, strange and soulful, singing words of God and hope and gratitude. The last thing I expected to hear from a blind man on a cold street corner.

Goodman is a street musician, also colloquially known as a 'busker'. Playing music for money on a street corner is his profession and, between the money he makes from the generosity of those who pause to listen, and his state disability cheques, he must manage to feed his family. Attached to the back of his guitar is a torn piece of cardboard which reads:



Goodman

I'm Blind
Somebody help me!!!
*Andiboni!!!*¹
Thank you!!!

Blind from meningitis from the age of 11 months, Goodman sits almost everyday on one of the corners of Greenmarket Square in Cape Town and praises his God with intense concentration. He is eyeless, perhaps that is another reason for the curled position he takes behind his guitar, but his weathered clothes and shoes are clean and neat, and he smiles warmly as he talks about his music. Who is this man? Is he a beggar? Is he an artist? Is his music worth paying for? Is he a storyteller? Should I listen?

Introduction to street performers

Since the earliest documented *joculatores* (Latin), European travellers who entertained with poetry and music as they went, street musicians have been a part of everyday life all around the world.² David Reck entertainingly introduces ‘wandering minstrels’ or street musicians as follows:

In older but not necessarily better times before entertainment was (like food) instant, easy and (unlike food) electric, musicians alone or in small groups walked from town to town bringing their music to doorsteps and market squares in return for a few coins or a dinner. While some were bread-and-butter musicians and a few perhaps hacks, others were creative artists—composers, poets, singers, instrumentalists—of the highest calibre. European history is full of legends about the Celtic bards, the minnesingers of Germany, the troubadours in France, and others in every nation and every language (...) (Reck 1976: 28).

On the London Underground there are specially demarcated, coloured areas where, accompanied by their backing tracks, guitarists can sing Bob Dylan covers.³ In Munich, Polish immigrants wail songs of home on their clarinets, playing with fingerless gloves in the cold. Stony, a familiar face on the streets of New Orleans,

¹ Xhosa, I am blind.

² The ‘Joculator’ entry from *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (1973) also includes: ‘[L., = jester; later, esp. med.L., professional jester, f. *joculari* jest (...)] A professional jester, minstrel (...)’ (*The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* 1973: 1134).

³ Busking, Transport for London <http://www.tfl.gov.uk/corporate/projectsandschemes/communityandeducation/2435.aspx> (Accessed: 19 August 2008).

infamously hustles and badgers his audiences for cash to feed his crack cocaine habit.⁴ ‘In the Bengal region of India the Bauls are a religious community drawn from the lowest strata of society. Many are householders but other pick up their plucked one-string *ektara* lutes (made from a bamboo neck and a gourd resonator) and take to the road as minstrels’ (Reck 1976: 35).

Street music performances come in many different forms and Philip Schuyler’s description of the current and past roles of Morocco’s Berber *rwais*, would not be incorrect when describing any number of differently located street performers:

By mixing music, poetry, and information heard on the road with their own experiences and compositions, professional musicians have been able to offer villagers not only a change from the steady diet of local music, but also news and opinions from the world outside their valley. In the days before good roads or radio, the *rwais* were valued primarily as journalists, historians, and moralists (Schuyler 1984: 92).

The *New Oxford Companion to Music* (1984) declares that historically:

(...) a great part of the musical life of the populations of European countries has been lived not in the concert hall, opera house, or church, but in the streets, where all, whatever their social position or wealth or poverty, could participate (Scholes & Gammond 1984: 1760).

These writers conclude their article by describing street music as ‘virtually extinct’ (Scholes & Gammond 1984: 1764). As this study will show, this statement could not be further from the truth. In South Africa in particular, more than ever before, musicians are taking their art and their stories onto the streets for cash. And one does not need to search far for examples of this growing trend in other parts of the world.⁵ The Transport for London website describes their London Underground busking scheme, that was set up in 2003, as a ‘smash hit with performers and travelling public’ and they boast ‘around 400 buskers perform(ing) more than 3,000 music events every week on the tube network’.⁶ Their reasons for performing and

⁴ ‘How much do you make?’, Stiff Arming Society (<http://www.stiffarmingsociety.com/>) http://www.stiffarmingsociety.com/busking/how_much.htm (Accessed: 20 January 2007).

⁵ The briefest of searches on the Internet reveals hundreds of sites advertising street musician festivals and events, as well as information sites for the street musicians themselves that include news on changing laws and the best locations to perform. Two examples of these are: The Halifax International Busker Festival <http://www.buskers.ca/> (Accessed: 19 August 2008) and the Busker Central—Buskers and Street performers reference site <http://www.buskercentral.com/> (Accessed: 19 August 2008).

⁶ Busking - Transport for London <http://www.tfl.gov.uk/corporate/projectsandschemes/communityandeducation/2435.aspx> (Accessed: 19 August 2008).

their societal function may have evolved and may vary from place to place, but worldwide, street performers are on the increase.

Buskers and street musicians

The word 'busk' has some quite diverse meanings, many of them with derogatory associations. The verb mostly describes some form of moving around, sometimes randomly. The *Oxford English Dictionary Online* describes different usages of the word as a verb including: 'to cruise as a pirate', 'Of a ship: To beat or cruise about; to beat to windward, tack (...) Also *to busk it out*: to weather a storm by tacking about.' And: 'to go about seeking *for*, to seek *after*'.⁷ Another way musicians use this word is to describe a performance that is created as it is played: 'To improvise (jazz or similar music). *Musicians' slang*.'

The definition that is relevant to this discussion is the word's current-day slang usage, which is: 'busking *vbl. n. and ppl. a.* Now usu., to play music or entertain in the streets'. This definition has long carried a negative association and the *New Oxford Companion to Music* (1984) has the following comments about buskers: 'The surviving street music is in the hands of the busker. The busker according to Partridge's *Dictionary of Historical Slang*, was one who sang or performed in a public house, and part of busking was to sell obscene songs and books in these venues' (Scholes & Gammond 1984:1764).

I have decided not to use the word 'busk' or 'busker' in this thesis for three reasons. Firstly the definition relevant to this topic is too vague. The title of this thesis is: 'An Ethnographic Study of Musical Storytelling in the Street Music of South Africa'. To 'busk' on the street can encompass all sorts of entertaining activities, including those that have nothing to do with *musical storytelling*. Buskers can be, amongst other things; jugglers, mime artists, dancers, acrobats and puppeteers, and I am only interested in musicians.

Secondly the word 'busk' is a slang word and although widely understood and used, it is unknown in some parts of the world. Neither the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (1973), nor the *New Oxford Companion to Music* (1984) include the word

⁷ 'Busk, v.' *Oxford English Dictionary* (<http://www.oed.com/>) <http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/display/50030005?keytype=ref&ijkey=hGhoBIVjqA11c> (Accessed: 24 August 2008).

‘busker’. The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (1973) does have the word ‘busk’, but—as with the current *Oxford English Dictionary Online*—it includes many variant meanings including ‘to hunt’ and ‘to shift about restlessly’, and describes its musical usage as slang.

Thirdly the combination of this word’s various meanings (to move around randomly, to perform music that is unprepared, its connection with the street and perhaps even its nautical usage) create a collective negative connotation. ‘Busking’ is often associated with being unprepared, being lackadaisical, or producing something that is of a lower quality and, despite the fact that many street musicians proudly refer to *themselves* as ‘buskers’, the negative associations of this label would not be representative in describing any of the musicians I have interviewed and selected as case studies. Henceforth the description ‘street musician’ will be used, and ‘busker’ only when I am referring to *any* type of street performer.

Introduction to street musicians

Traditionally street musicians have been associated with transitory habits. They are not expected to build careers, nor to put down roots, but are merely ‘tiding over’ until they move on. The image of the European ‘wandering minstrel’ of old that David Reck describes—with his lute strapped to his back, without a fixed location or a defined social context—is a very romantic image. Carrying his tunes from far-off places and then displaying his nostalgia for the locals, raising just enough money to continue on his way, this elusive figure has inspired literature, poetry and art.

Africa also has long and rich traditions of diverse types of travelling musicians, both formal and informal. History offers many different examples. Mungo Park, travelling in West Africa in 1796, describes singing journeymen who he called ‘Jillikeas’.⁸ These travelling musicians were part of a caravan that Park joined and he writes that ‘their musical talents were frequently exerted either to divert our fatigue, or obtain us a welcome from strangers’ (Park 2002: 301). Writing more generally of the music he encountered when exploring the course of the Niger, Park writes:

With the love of music is naturally connected a taste for poetry: and fortunately for the poets of Africa, they are in great measure exempted from that neglect and indigence which, in more polished countries, commonly attend the votaries of the Muses. (...) the most numerous are the *singing men*,

⁸ ‘*Jeli ke* is the term for male griot in the heartland of the Mande world’ (Hale 1998: 96).

called *Jilli kea*. (...) these itinerant bards are much employed and respected by the people, and very liberal contributions are made for them' (Park 2002: 258-269).

Also in West Africa, in Gambia the *gewel* have a more complex role. They act as both professional entertainers and, more formally, as historians and keepers of traditional ways (Reck 1976: 32). Reck also cites the Ethiopian *azmari*. Part of an ancient tradition, these travelling musicians are 'repositories of the legends and history of the region' (Reck 1976:35) and they include songs in their repertoire that can be dated from before the Middle Ages. Reck describes them as travelling from 'village to village where they are received with hospitality and delight; they improvise their words to fit the occasion—weddings, eulogies, praise to the host or the beauty of the woman of the area, epics of war or the conquests of love (...)' (Reck 1976: 32). The *rwais*, already mentioned, are Moroccan travelling musicians. The great Berber explorer Ibn Battuta is credited with the first written description of West African griots⁹ (Hale 1998: 74). In the 14th century he had travelled to 'the capital of the Mali empire, in the region known today as the border between northern Guinea and southwestern Mali. There, at the court of Mansa Sulayman (reigned 1341-60) he encountered griots' (Hale 1998: 1).

These are but a few examples of types of 'street' or travelling musicians in Africa. These performers have long fulfilled many varied, and sometimes not easily recognised social functions, and they undoubtedly have a much wider impact than merely to provide entertainment.

This study has focussed on modern day South African street performers, some of who are struggling against incredible odds to fulfil some of these functions. Often they have overcome great social and economic hardship in order to practice their art and craft, and to express their stories to those who gather to listen. Some could also simply be defined as beggars, making an almost melodious noise for a quick buck, and examples of both these characterisations, amongst others, will be explored in the following chapters.

⁹ 'Griot' is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as 'A member of a class of travelling poets, musicians, and entertainers in North and West Africa, whose duties include the recitation of tribal and family histories; an oral folk-historian or village story-teller, a praise-singer' http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50098924?case_id=leX2-SYHUGg-4805&p=1&d=1&sp=1&qt=1&ct=0&ad=1&print=1 (Accessed: 2 September 2008).

When interviewed, these various street musicians describe very diverse sets of circumstances and experiences. From the daily regulars like Goodman who strum for ‘pennies’, to the professional businessman who puts on a choreographed show for the tourists in the busiest parts of town, from the dramatic poets who perform what could be called street opera for the protection of their own sense of ethnic identity, to a circle of women who peacefully stand and sing a hymn in the middle of a protest march, these are all examples of the varied storytellers working within South Africa’s urban landscape. Despite these differences; different stories to tell, different reasons for performing, different performance methods, all these musicians are unified by their performance location. None of them are playing to a comfortably seated audience in a tiered amphitheatre or concert hall. They are in the market place, along the sidewalk, in the square and crouched against a wall, so that everyone who passes, or pauses, will hear them, and this creates unique and fascinating performance environments.

The street, whether a pier or a corner, has physical, psychological and social parameters, it is placed within a political and economic macrostructure—in this case South Africa—it presents freedoms and restrictions, and each street musician must deal with all these factors as best he can to suit his purposes.

‘In the Blood’—Goodman’s story

***Observations surrounding Goodman’s performance of the song ‘In The Blood’.
Greenmarket Square in Cape Town. The late morning of 22 September 2007.***

Abigail, Goodman’s wife, hovers protectively by his shoulder. In one hand she holds the cup of sweet tea I have bought for him to drink during our interview, and with the other she holds onto Goodman. He doesn’t seem to be comfortable talking unless he is holding her hand. I am the intangible stranger; a voice in the void, but their communication is full of light touches and physical guides.

‘Ekskies...(Afrikaans, excuse me) The Lord is coming,’ Goodman tells me in his soft, halting speaking style, nothing at all like his fluid and tuneful singing voice.¹⁰ ‘He is coming back soon to save us... um... and we must praise his name forever. Another song... um... er um... Oh come let us sing our joyful song and praise his

¹⁰ Here and elsewhere I am not using standard Afrikaans spelling but trying to approach the dialect spoken by Goodman.

name forever... in the blood... ja (Afrikaans, yes)! This song is called "In the Blood"'. He releases Abigail's hand and begins to strum again, far more comfortable telling me his story with music than with speech, far clearer, stronger and more animated. He seems more in touch with his God, holding his battered guitar, than when he is battling through the dark without the solid path of a chord sequence to guide him. His lyrics and melody lines are simple and repetitive, and the steady, unwavering rhythm of his scratchy strumming is hypnotic. I sit next to him, on the pavement, and realise that this is the interview, this is who Goodman is and what he is trying to say and that I need to listen and observe differently if I am going to extrapolate the real stories from this case study.

I look around. In front of us the market is setting up, getting ready for the day. This is an inner-city market; it is full of hustlers and pickpockets, Nigerian traders and Ethiopian hawkers, policemen and tourists. A dense, tightly-packed visual explosion of eye-catching wares; bright strings of beads, ceremonial masks (sometimes even 'real' ones), polished wooden carvings and flapping sheets of colourful material. But the nearby stallholders are listening as they work, sometimes stopping for a while, standing still as they watch him. Nobody bothers him, or asks him to move. The pickpockets leave him alone. Perhaps this is because he is a delimited 'sound island'. Encapsulated in the dark, he occupies and interacts with the space around him only as far as the sound of his voice will travel.

Not a Bach fugue

Goodman's tunes are simple messages; they mostly resemble one another, repeating the basic chords that his three-stringed guitar is capable of, and yet he manages to improvise around his simple tunes very effectively. In all the performances I observed for this study I never heard any of the musicians repeat any section of music note for note. Their repertoires are extensive and they rely heavily on improvisation to keep their music sounding fresh, and to include new ideas into their acts. So, if there isn't a pre-established, repeated canon of material for me to study and draw conclusions from, what am I to examine and discuss? If the musical object morphs with each performance, then where does the value of this study lie? And what should its focus be?

This observation and the thoughts it inspired have caused me to approach this study with a different intention; I did not look for single musical narrative items, which I could then dissect and present, but rather I attempted to identify unique aspects of this performance environment and the patterns, or frames of behaviour these cause and inspire. I extensively explore and discuss these and finally draw conclusions. Individual case studies were interesting in that they were clear examples of aspects of this complicated and interrelated performance environment. They were also representative of varying responses to the restrictions and circumstances inherent in this environment. That is not to say that this study moves away from the individual; quite the contrary, the method I have chosen to represent my case studies is intentionally very inclusive and personal.

The *unique* characteristics of this particular performance environment and the ensuing responses from the performers and audience members that are important to this study are:

- The particular environment that *South African streets* provide for their street performers.
- How this difficult environment forces street performers to *maximise their success*.
- The *collaborative* atmosphere and *musically inclusive* behaviours between performers that this inspires.
- The streets' *lack of containment*, both physically and socially, of both performer and his audience, and hence the fluidity of the audience and the performer's necessary *flexibility*.
- The *immediacy* of the feedback received and hence the performers' skilful use of *framing* techniques.

These aspects will be explained and clarified as this thesis develops. In order to effectively explore these issues I had to choose an approach, which would cause me to review how I conceptualised 'story' within this context. Chapter five, in which narrative—more generally and with individual musical stories—is discussed, explores what constitutes a story, for the purposes of *this* study, and how best to represent and examine these stories within this broader theoretical perspective. This direction also caused me to choose a specific ethnographic approach. Both these approaches allowed

me to develop and draw practical and theoretical conclusions around these representations. These approaches will be briefly introduced below.

In his editorial for the journal *Ethnomusicology*, Timothy J. Cooley (2007) explores how attitudes in ethnomusicology, and the definitions of what constitutes suitable study, have shifted. He highlights how each of the authors published in that volume ‘approach their subjects in radically different ways’ (Cooley 2007: vi) and he stresses that to define ethnomusicology as involving traditional ethnography and fieldwork in a particular location i.e. adhering to the ‘area studies’ paradigm, is no longer correct (Cooley 2007: vii). Following this trend I have been careful, in chapter three, to examine the location of the street as not only a physical space, but as a conceptualised space as well, and to explore a very fluid understanding of location. The street will be fully discussed in chapter three and therefore will not be discussed further here.

In order to introduce both the approach I have taken to storytelling and the ethnographic technique I have employed, it is first necessary to examine musical storytelling from a more general perspective.

Introduction to musical storytelling

In their article ‘Musical Storytelling’, Joseph Ng’andu and Richard Okafor state: ‘It is difficult to think of any clan, cultural group or community in sub-Saharan Africa that does not tell stories’ (Ng’andu & Okafor 2003:179). It is difficult to think of any cultural group anywhere on the planet that doesn’t tell stories: fables, tales, myths, stories, legends, poems, epics, plays, films (including screenplays), books, even comics, abound everywhere. Storytelling is a practice that all are familiar with, pivotal to defining culture, community and identity, but it is a complex art. A generally understood description could be: constructed by a storyteller and conveyed through a medium i.e. a sequence of pictures, words, actions, etc., a story or a narrative is a series of events, either real or imagined, sometimes both. The storyteller creates a parallel universe for the recipient, and for a time, the listeners, readers or audience are transported into their own imaginations. They are guided, with greater or lesser skill, through an alternate reality, which can often have little resemblance to their own.

Throughout this text I've used the term 'narrative' as a synonym for 'story'. Narrative is defined: 'As a mass noun: the practice or art of narration or storytelling: material for narration.'¹¹ Originally it was a legal term: 'A part of a legal document which contain(ed) a statement of alleged or relevant facts closely connected with the matter or purpose of the document'. This gradually softened into: 'An account of a series of events, facts, etc., given in order and with the establishing of connections between them; a narration, a story, an account.' And in literary criticism: 'The part of a text, esp. a work of fiction, which represents the sequence of events, as distinguished from that dealing with dialogue, description, etc.' It is commonly understood what a 'story' is, and for now I am not going to address 'narrative theory' or discuss 'storytelling' in *theoretical* detail.¹²

A well-presented, good story is powerful and made all the more so, the more vividly we can be transported. Many human beings struggle to tell the difference between a vividly imagined event and a real one. Our pupils dilate, our brain chemistry changes, our muscles fill with blood as if we were really within our own imagined scenarios. This implies that a very skilled storyteller has the power to almost create a fictitious memory, one that our bodies almost cannot distinguish from a real experience. So yes, stories are powerful and useful. And we use them to learn to navigate our actual reality, to prepare, to protect, to evaluate and ascribe worth, and to build 'experience', a valuable commodity. Add music and one immediately intensifies and more powerfully facilitates the emotional arcs and dips of any story, whether it includes lyrics or not. Musicals, operas, songs, ballads, chants, sung prayers, hymns, revolutionary songs, anthems, programme music, film music, song cycles (*Lieder*)... the addition of music turns up the volume in more ways than one. This is a well-understood and documented observation. Two illustrative examples follow:

Gerhard Kubik's study of the *álò* chantefable ('story songs') of the Yoruba of Nigeria, West Africa, describes the function of the emotional charge provided by specifically constructed music inserted into a story. *Álò* are enacted folk tales that contain songs. They are performed by an experienced storyteller and are interspersed

¹¹ 'Narrative, *n*', *Oxford English Dictionary* (<http://www.oed.com/>) <http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/display/00321221?keytype=ref&ijkey=o27js.ulJ.5to> (Accessed: 25 August 2008).

¹² 'Story-telling, *n*. defined simply as 'the action of telling stories.' *Oxford English Dictionary* (<http://www.oed.com/>) <http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/display/50238555?keytype=ref&ijkey=BIptyb1E10aQQ> (Accessed on the 25 August 2008).

with prescribed audience responses (Kubik 1989: 134). Kubik writes, and he could be describing any number of musical (and oral) narrative traditions:

As in other cultures, a major function of the story songs in *alò* is to underline dramatic situations. Within a plot, a song therefore often appears at moments of crisis or turning points. Sometimes a song portrays the character of a protagonist by textual and/or musical means. And often also, in the story songs something is articulated, hinted at or leaked which must not or could not be said in ordinary language. The story songs in such cases make the 'voice' of another perceptible level audible (...) (Kubik 1989: 139).

Another example that is less close to the subject matter of this study, but is clearly illustrative of the immense power of music inclusion, is the difference between the success of the literary and of the musical versions of *The Phantom of the Opera*. According to the official website of the musical *The Phantom Of The Opera*¹³: 'The original production of *The Phantom Of The Opera* opened on October 9th 1986 and is now in its 22nd year.'¹⁴ The site also states that: 'It is estimated that Phantom has been seen by more than 80 million people in 124 cities in 25 countries, and the total worldwide gross is now in excess of \$5 billion.'¹⁵ This musical, full of evocative and memorable melodies, has grossed more in overall earnings than any other single entertainment entity ever.¹⁶ The book of the same name is almost unknown, the author died without significant recognition, and it raises the question: even with the same cast, costumes and script, would it have been remotely as successful had it been a play?

'Who says that music is innocent'? (Tenaille 2002: 10).

¹³ Music written by Andrew Lloyd Webber and the lyrics by Charles Hart and Richard Stilgoe.

¹⁴ *The Phantom of the Opera* <http://www.thephantomoftheopera.com/london/> (Accessed: 20 August 2008).

¹⁵ Facts and figures, *The Phantom of the Opera* http://www.thephantomoftheopera.com/the_show/facts_and_figures.php (Accessed: 20 August 2008).

¹⁶ The Show, Background, *The Phantom of the Opera* http://www.thephantomoftheopera.com/the_show/background.php (Accessed: 25 August 2008).

Interdependency and complexity in storytelling

When I began to explore this topic: ‘An ethnographic study of musical storytelling in the street music of South Africa’, I very quickly realised that there were different types of story at play in this study. I also realised that these different types were interdependent and that it was impossible to separate them. There was the street performer’s personal story—his real life experience (political, social, economic, cultural and linguistic context); there was his intended story—what message he wished to convey; there was his observable story, both in his performed musical output (how the music—through its harmonic, melodic and rhythmic structure—was representative of the thematic content of the story), and his personal, projected story—how he chose to frame himself and his performance to achieve the desired response from the audience, and there was the story received and reflected by this audience. Lastly, there was my own story—the ethnographer’s perceived and reflected story. I realised that it was the interaction *between* these different ‘storyfields’ that was significant.

All these intertwined levels might tell us yet another story about ourselves. A broader anthropological, cultural and socio-biological story. The street can be a very harsh environment, not much can hide or be hidden within its immediacy, its lack of containment or its brutal requirements for survival. Street performers become habituated to the street’s complexity, living in its multifaceted cultures and customs, utilizing its spaces and times, and, whether they are consciously aware or not, highlighting a context that produces a fascinating interwoven system of storytelling.

The interactions are complex, particularly—as was often the case in this study—when the music is performed by members of an ethnic grouping other than that in which the music originated. Ng’andu and Okafor (2003: 179) have observed and written that when musical stories are performed outside their original contexts:

(...) elements of the musical language of the original owners of the music flow into performance systems of another culture or ethnic group. Culture contact ensures that stories flow across cultural boundaries, retaining something of their origin while undergoing adaptations, selections and variation.

In chapter five the concept of ‘story’ will be reopened and the construct of a ‘storyfield’ will be defined. Having introduced these thoughts for further discussion,

the broad, commonly understood definition and general description I have suggested above, are sufficient for the purposes of the development of this thesis until then.

The role of the ethnographer

One challenge that often comes with the description of aesthetic phenomena is to walk the thin line between romanticization on the one hand and irony on the other (Kisliuk 1997: 38).

Why do I include my own story and interpretations as a relevant form of storytelling? Is this too loose a definition? Where does storytelling end and contextualisation begin? It has been argued that, as an impartial observer, I should retain distance and keep my approach purely observational, removing my personal story from the above list. I found this impossible for a number of reasons. Music is an art. Storytelling is an art. They are designed to cause an emotional response and our observatory, cultural and emotional platforms influence and colour our experiences of art of any kind. *We compare*, and that comparison is necessary and helpful. So, instead of banishing my story from this ethnography, I have tried to embrace it fully and usefully. Susan Sontag, discussing artistic and literary analysis in her article 'Against Interpretation' writes:

(...) interpretation is not (as most people assume) an absolute value, a gesture of mind situated in some timeless realm of capabilities. Interpretation must itself be evaluated, with a historical view of human consciousness (Sontag (1964) 1972: 655).

Although she is not specifically referring to music, she brings our attention to the fact that we should include not only our own sensory reactions to any art analysis, but that we should question our very understanding of our own conscious responses. I believe that this is relevant with respect to the nature of this study. Sontag (1972 (1964): 660), writing in the 1960s, was reflecting and describing a move in the humanities towards the personal experience, and she concluded her article by stating:

What is important now is to recover our senses. We must learn to *see* more, to *hear* more, to *feel* more (...) The aim of all commentary on art now should be to make works of art – and, by analogy, our own experience – more rather than less, real to us.

The humanities, including ethnomusicology, took up this challenge and ethnomusicologist Michelle Kisliuk (1997: 23), writing in the 1990s, reiterates this point and its importance to ethnomusicology:

The renewed emphasis on experience is part of a continuing seachange in the humanities that is moving us toward reflexive, nonobjectivist scholarship (and, not by coincidence, distancing us from historically colonialist approaches).

Writing about her field experiences, Kisliuk (1997: 38) is unabashed about including her own stories and feelings.

When writing about field experience we want to get as close to a truth as possible, but evocation means selecting among experiences and choosing among a variety of ways to convey them (...) we move beyond an objectivistic style of writing (...) The more explicit we are in our efforts to evoke experience, the closer we can come to communicating that experience and what it might mean.

On a number of occasions I was given no choice but to be part of the case study I was observing. Street musicians, aware of my scrutiny, would spontaneously include me into their acts. The validity of my own storytelling—my personal experience of these performances—is variable, as personal stories often are. They are susceptible to the corrosion of time and memory, and particularly to the veils of emotion.

Chapter structure

In order to maintain a coherent unfolding of narrative throughout, the chapters of this thesis are structured as follows:

- Chapter two looks at *South Africa* as a macrostructure. I explore the social, economic and political backdrop of the life of the average South African street musician, as well as beginning to examine the physical environment that he must work within. This chapter includes a summary of tourism in South Africa.
- Chapter three examines *the street* from all angles and uses this as a starting point to define and understand ‘street music’. The street as a ‘location’ is examined as a physical environment, a performance space and a psychological construct, and different types of streets and their various opportunities and restrictions are explored.

- Chapter four interweaves a discussion of *performance* and *audience*. When looking at street music, these two subjects are inextricably interdependent and therefore will be explored in conjunction with each other. All aspects of street performance from the physical (including setting, costume, etc.) to perceptual (audience manipulation, and framing) representation will be addressed.
- Chapter five addresses *storytelling*. By using the gradually constructed understanding of this performance environment developed in the previous chapters, musical narrative is re-conceptualised and a representative model is used to demonstrate how these various types of story interact.
- Chapter six examines an overview of the key characteristics identified in this particular study and draws practical conclusions about street musicians in South Africa. The discussion is then widened to explore how this study is positioned within the development of the field of ethnomusicology and what relevance, if any, this has.

Each chapter is prefaced with a brief abstract, describing in more detail *how* the subject of that chapter will be developed and *what* will be included. Relevant case studies and their discussion are gradually introduced throughout the thesis. These case studies are used to develop and illustrate relevant sections of discussion throughout.

What are the expected conclusions?

Goodman is probably one of the least easily accessible of the case studies included in this study. He looks much older than his forty-six years of age, his teeth are crooked, his guitar playing is out of tune and basic. Until he smiles, his face is creased in frowning concentration, and he sits hunched and stiff around his instrument, hiding his face. Shielded by his instrument he has no interaction with his audience when he performs, preferring to ignore them completely and focus on his song and the sound capsule he has created for himself. One has to get quite close to him to hear what he is singing and he clearly isn't trying to attract too much attention. So what am I expecting to learn from him? Does this study make any contribution to ethnomusicology in a broader sense? What are the trends within the field currently and where could this study be positioned within these movements?

John Blacking (1992: 86) described ethnomusicology as: 'A discipline that combines scientific and humanistic methods of research to study human musical

communication'. Here Blacking refers to the use of technology including the 'phonograph and electrical instruments' (1992:86), which give ethnomusicology its scientific validity, in that they 'enable people to measure accurately the variety of musical scales and to listen repeatedly to the subtleties and complexities of aurally transmitted performance'. The technology available has become more sophisticated, and expanded in its possibilities, but so has the entire subject and the questions that can be asked. I will suggest that Blacking's quote was the opening of a door, and that his writings were already moving the subject towards this approach. As academia's egalitarians and perhaps as musicology's scientists, the field is currently placed at a hinge—attempting to find a greater understanding of humanity through understanding, analysis, exposure and contextualisation of the world's music.

I am *not* suggesting that ethnomusicologists should relinquish any aspect of their field to the scientific community. I agree with Nicholas Cook (2008: 1187) writing in a recent article in the science journal *Nature*:¹⁷

Scientific measurement and cultural approaches to performance can be linked usefully. But this is a marriage of complementary approaches, rather than a convergence towards a unified discipline.

Ethnomusicologists continue to seek universals and exceptions, patterns and paradigms, the unique and the normal, but in chapter six I will argue that the approach to these activities is changing. As discussed in the following chapter, the streets of South Africa are an unusual geographical and social environment within which to explore the function and impact of the street musician. It is one that highlights the cultural placement and functional interplay between these musicians, their music, and the society around them. It is a good place to find humanity.

¹⁷ This article is the eighth in a nine part series of articles entitled 'Science and Music' www.nature.com/nature/focus/scienceandmusic (Accessed: 1 July 2008).

Chapter Two

South Africa

South Africa presents a unique environment as a macro-context for this study. It is vital that the impact that South Africa's social issues, such as; unemployment, crime, health (the social impact of such widespread diseases as HIV/Aids and tuberculosis) and xenophobia, have on its street musicians is understood. This chapter will be examining these issues in relation to this impact, as well as South Africa's climate, its changing tourism industry and its aural environment—what musical influences street musicians are being exposed to via the radio, mobile telephones, the internet and television. This chapter attempts to clearly describe and illustrate the social, political and economic parameters of life in South Africa and to what extent they influence the daily lives of these musicians.

This chapter will highlight:

- The difficulties presented by South Africa's social, economic and political environment, and how these differ from other countries, thereby creating a unique macrostructure.
- How comfortable the climate and physical environment in South Africa can be relative to other street performing environments.
- What an important role the health and development of the South African tourism industry plays.

Within Africa

Africa often enters the global imagination through news accounts of ethnic wars, famine, and unstable political regimes. (...) The repetitive refrain—signalling a cycle of destruction and unrest—encircles sub-Saharan Africa like a swarm of bad omens that, more often than not, fails to distinguish national differences or historical moment (Ebron 2002: 2).

Against the backdrop of a continent as collectively war-damaged, politically fraught and economically challenged as Africa, South Africa stands out as a unique example. With a history so dark and abhorrent as to have incited the disgust of the international community, and a present so extraordinary as to make it a beacon of

hope for many, present day South Africa has become a complex and interesting macrostructure within which to explore artistic development of almost any sort. A broad understanding of South Africa, with reference to the causative affects of its recent history, and the stark contrast between it and its neighbouring states, is essential to comprehending the position of the street musician within its context. But how is South Africa so different? What makes its streets, at the present time, such unique environments?

The good, the bad and the ugly

At first glance South Africa appears currently to be a paradise. It is at peace with its neighbours, relatively sparsely populated, and has a gentle climate. It is developing a booming tourist industry and is run by a comparatively benign democratic government. It can boast a substantial infrastructure, an economy that many argue has never been better administered, a good roadways system and is rich in valuable natural resources. It has a relatively strong judicial system and one of the fairest, friendliest and newest constitutions in the world today.¹ All of this is in such direct contrast to some of its sub-Saharan neighbours, for example the Gambia or Zimbabwe, that it is sometimes hard to remember that one is on the same continent, much less in the same region.

The present, however, is very different from South Africa's past. From 1948 until 1994, South Africa struggled under a brutal and oppressive apartheid system, following on a colonial history beset with racial prejudice, which enabled the intensifying of discriminatory legislation against the majority of its citizens. This notorious political and social regime racially segregated the population, denying millions of South Africans their basic rights to freedom, education, free speech and legitimate political representation (Thompson 2006). Robert Guest, formally the African editor of *The Economist*, sums up the extent of the radical shift South Africa has undergone in the last few years:

The constitution of 1996 promises freedom of expression, information, movement and association, not to mention the rights to privacy, access to adequate housing and a clean environment. For a country that until recently deprived nine tenths of its citizens of its population of full citizenship, this has been a dramatic change (Guest 2004: 221).

¹ The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996)
<http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/UN/UNPAN005172.pdf> (Accessed: 4 August 2008).

An excerpt from the preface to the constitution of the Republic of South Africa reads:

We, the people of South Africa,
Recognise the injustices of our past;
Honour those who suffered for justice and freedom in our land;
Respect those who have worked to build and develop our country; and
Believe that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity
(*The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* 1996).

This all seems very hopeful, but when one begins to peel back the layers a more complex picture emerges. South Africa's abusive past has left the country scarred and its seemingly idyllic present is marred by social and political issues, which threaten to undermine its future. This *apparent* state of grace might not last, and to the average street musician working on South Africa's streets, some of these issues are not merely theoretical, they are practical concerns, relevant to daily existence and survival.

I will not be exploring the history of street music in South Africa and this chapter is focussed on the present, examining the recent past only insofar as it directly impacts those street musicians who are actively engaging in musical storytelling on the streets today. Busking is a very context-dependent activity and as the context alters so do the practices—in this case the context has changed very dramatically and the current-day street musicians are working in a present that is almost unrecognisable in relation to its past. I am not attempting to provide an in-depth or detailed account of the state of current-day South Africa either, merely an overview to enable the correct positioning of the street musicians I have studied within their proper macro-context.

The divide between rich and poor

Almost at the tip of Africa, Cape Town, as many travel brochures will tell you, is such a beautiful city that many believe it is one of the most spectacular in the world. Viewed from the top of its famous landmark, Table Mountain, the city is neatly framed between a wide bay, the surrounding mountains and a clear blue sky. As far as I can tell, below me lies a functional city, humming along through its day. Elegantly starting from the slopes of the mountain and leading down to the busy harbour and the Victoria and Alfred Waterfront,² there is no hint of poverty or unrest or severe social

² Henceforth this location will be written as the 'V&A Waterfront'. I have often heard the V&A Waterfront as being described as the most visited tourist destination in Africa – eclipsing even the Pyramids. The accuracy of this commonly stated belief is unverified.

issues. There are no visible shantytowns and one cannot hear sirens. Looking from above, it would be all too easy to believe the paradise myth, but this comfortable vantage point, high above the city, is a far cry from the conditions unseen in other areas. Less than 12 or 13 kilometres around the curve of the bay, on the Cape Flats, are areas that tell a very different story.

South Africa's population is dramatically and dangerously economically divided. As Guest glibly, but pointedly comments: 'The Third World lives in a shed at the bottom of the First World's garden, which he weeds on Wednesdays' (Guest 2004: 220). In their article entitled: 'Democracy and distribution in highly unequal economies: the case of South Africa', Nicoli Natrass and Jeremy Seekings examine the history and the current impact of such a divided society.

(...) it is not hard to see how inequality in South Africa was exacerbated by public policies that systematically discriminated on racial grounds, restricting the income-generating opportunities open to the majority of the population. We would then expect the reduction in discriminatory measures (from the 1970s onwards) to have had an equalising impact on the income distribution. We would also expect the election of the African National Congress (ANC) to power in 1994 to have transformed public policies still further in support of poverty relief and redistribution. Yet available data suggests that the overall level of inequality has changed little with the dismantling of apartheid (Natrass & Seekings 2001: 472).³

These writers describe South Africa, along with Brazil, as being two nations with damagingly unequal income distribution (Natrass & Seekings 2001: 471).

Township life

The areas along the N2 highway, as one drives towards Cape Town International Airport from the city centre, form a visual, perhaps symbolic, representation of this unredressed inequality. As one travels further away from the city the dwellings one can see from the road gradually become more and more informal. Langa, Thambo, Guguletu, Khayelitsha, Crossroads. Some of these areas are more established and less informal than others, but as one reaches the outskirts of the city, one is confronted by entire suburbs of shacks. These township areas are a shocking reminder that things are not all blue skies and lovely views. Tin-sheeting and cardboard shacks pile up against the concrete fences that are erected to keep them

³ The reasons for this failure to economically rebalance is discussed in detail in this article. I will not explore these reasons here, as it is sufficient for the purposes of this study, to realise that this economic inequality exists and that its impact is far reaching.

from spilling right up to the edge of the highway. Makeshift electricity poles stand intermittently, over-laden with tangles of wires, leading to individual shacks. Dogs hunt and pick their way through the rubbish that is too awkward to collect along the dirt roads and plastic bags are snagged along every fence. There are large puddles that snake away from the communal taps and cows and horses graze on what they can find along the highway. Rows and rows of graffiti-covered communal toilets are a blatant indicator of the basic conditions that the inhabitants of these shacks must endure.

Many of South Africa's townships are sprawling informal suburbs tacked around the edges of more affluent areas and, although the government is making efforts to provide housing, clean water, electricity



A stall in Guguletu

and adequate schooling to these areas, life in these shantytowns is still a continuous battle against incredible odds to break through the poverty barrier into an existence that isn't hand to mouth.

The journalist and historian Martin Meredith, writing in 2006 about the social challenges South Africa was facing in 2004, states:

Out of a population of 45 million, more than 3 million lived in squatter camps or informal settlements, many enduring abject poverty, with little or no sanitation, clean water or power and no visible means of support (Meredith 2006: 674).

Many of these problems have still yet to be adequately addressed today. He goes on to say that by 2006 five million people still didn't have access to safe water and that seven million South Africans were struggling 'below the national poverty line' (Meredith 2006: 674).

The people who live in these shack communities deal with South Africa's myriad of interlocking social and economic problems at the sharp end, and all of the street musicians that I interviewed for this study live in townships. A chilling list of the seemingly insurmountable real life issues includes: unemployment, poor

education, lack of housing, crime, xenophobia or inter-factional fighting, access to electricity and clean water, healthcare and the terrifying HIV/Aids and tuberculosis prevalence rates that cause and exacerbate a host of further problems.

The estimated adult HIV prevalence rates for those fifteen years or older was 18.8% at the end of 2005. That means that one in five people in South Africa deal with a terminal disease on a daily basis.⁴ The ‘Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/Aids’ website verifies this statistic, and makes it all the more real by stating that this means that an estimated five and a half million people are living with HIV in South Africa.⁵

When I asked the street musicians who are part of this study which of this litany of difficulties causes the most concern, unemployment comes at the top of the list. This answer is slightly surprising—perhaps it is that many of the other issues seem insurmountable. Because of the importance placed on this issue and its direct effect on street musicians in South Africa, I will continue to discuss unemployment and look at some of the causative issues. This is a particularly tangled social, political, economic and cultural web, and is therefore unlikely to be resolved soon.

It is necessarily to briefly qualify and reiterate that I am focussing this discussion specifically on the lower income sectors of South African society. The middle class, particularly the so-called ‘black middle class’ have fared very differently since 1994. According to Roger Southall (2004: 539)⁶ ‘a fairly rapidly growing black (new) middle class is the prime beneficiary of ANC rule’. Employment and income figures have jumped dramatically for this much smaller section of South African society, but not sufficiently to significantly dent overall unemployment figures, and Southall states that: ‘One of the great ironies of the arrival of the democratic era is the widening inequality of incomes’ (Southall 2004:539).

Unlike the better-educated middle class, the average lower-income South African can do little to improve their own situation, let alone the country’s education policy or healthcare system. But they can try to hunt for a job. In this context the inability to find a job, to find paying work, is a disempowering, terrifying and potentially life-threatening situation. No money means no *food*, let alone anything

⁴ South Africa, UNICEF http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/southafrica_statistics.html (Accessed: 20 January 2008).

⁵ South Africa, The ‘Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS’ http://www.unaids.org/en/CountryResponses/Countries/south_africa.asp (Accessed: 20 January 2008).

⁶ Roger Southall’s paper is entitled ‘Political Change and the Black Middle Class in Democratic South Africa’.

else and, if there is a family to feed, or medical treatment needed, desperation is a very short step away.

Unemployment: ‘No Work, No Money, Please Help’

Desperation can make people turn in quite different directions. Some, as will be discussed shortly, turn to crime. This obliquely reduces the government’s ability to provide jobs even further, by destabilising South Africa’s social structure and chipping away at an already fragile developing economy. Others turn to entrepreneurship. If there is little paying work to be had, and it does not appear that the situation will improve in the near future, some will be courageous enough to create their own.

Examining just the period of history after the 1994 elections, the reasons for South Africa’s high unemployment rates are complicated, but the simplified reason is just that there are too few jobs. Writing in 2006, Meredith acknowledges South Africa’s many achievements during its first ten years of democracy, but his comments on South Africa’s overwhelming unemployment problem are hard hitting:

(...) the magnitude of the problems that SA still faced remained daunting. Despite economic growth unemployment rates stood at 40 percent. The number of job-seekers still continued to outpace the growth in jobs. Fewer than 7 percent of school leavers could expect to find jobs in the formal economy. In some rural areas the unemployment rate was as high as 95 percent; sometimes a dozen people survived on one old age pension (Meredith 2006: 674).

According to the Labour Force Survey (P0210) of September 2007 (published on 27 March 2008):⁷ ‘The unemployment rate declined from 25,5% in September 2006 to 23,0% in September 2007’, and ‘The percentage of working-age South Africans with jobs rose from 42,7% in September 2006 to 43,5% in September 2007.’ Quoting from the summary of this report:

⁷ Statistics South Africa <http://www.statssa.gov.za/default.asp> (Accessed 12 August 2008). This site publishes the official governmental statistics on South Africa. The accuracy of the information of this site has been informally called into question, I therefore view these statistics as indicators of trends. The Labour Force Survey (P0210) September 2007 <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/statsdownload.asp?PPN=P0210&SCH=4133> (Accessed 12 August 2008).

In September 2007 there were 30 413 000 persons aged 15–65 years comprising the labour market, of which:

- 13 234 000 persons were employed
- 3 945 000 persons were unemployed (official definition)
- 13 235 000 persons were not economically active
- 17 178 000 persons were in the labour force or economically active
- 3 425 000 persons were discouraged work-seekers

This may appear hopeful, until one takes a more careful look and realises that for only 43.5% of a working-age population of a country to have jobs is a very poor statistic indeed. The report also admits that: ‘The labour force participation rate declined from 57,3% in September 2006 to 56,5% in September 2007’ (Labour Force Survey 2007). The report’s grim conclusion is that: ‘In the year to September 2007, the number of discouraged work-seekers increased. This, coupled with the decline in unemployment, suggests that people who had been previously looking for work gave up hope of finding employment’ (Labour Force Survey 2007).

In a then unpublished paper dated September 2006 with the working title ‘Understanding South Africa’s Economic Puzzles’, Dani Rodrik of the Harvard University John F. Kennedy School of Government writes:⁸

The most worrying aspect of this disappointing economic performance is unemployment. South Africa’s unemployment rate today stands at 26 percent according to the narrower definition of who is unemployed, and at 40 percent if one includes discouraged workers (...). This is one of the highest rates of unemployment anywhere in the world (...). Furthermore, unemployment appears to have increased particularly rapidly since the democratic transition (from a “low” of 13 percent in 1993). (The lack of labor force surveys makes it difficult to know what the comparable unemployment rates were in the 1980s.) As would be expected, unemployment is heavily concentrated among the young, unskilled, and the black population (Rodrik 2007: 3 unpublished).

Rodrik argues that impractical legislation and inordinately high wages have forced employers to cut down on the number of expensive employees they use, and Robert Guest is mostly in agreement with him, also dedicating substantial text inches to discussing the country’s Labour Laws as a complicated, additional, contributing factor to South Africa’s unemployment predicament (Guest 2004: 223-225). Guest criticises the ANC for granting: ‘First-world legal privileges to a workforce with largely Third-world skills’ (Guest 2004: 223-224). He argues that these employees do not earn their employers enough to make their permanent employment economically

⁸ ‘Understanding South Africa’s Economic Puzzles’ Dani Rodrik (unpublished) <http://ksghome.harvard.edu/~drodrik/Understanding%20South%20Africa.pdf> (Accessed 20 February 2008). Rodrik writes ‘This paper was prepared for the Harvard University Center for International Development’ (www.cid.harvard.edu/cidwp/130.htm) It is labeled: CID Working Paper No. 130.

worthwhile. He sadly states that: ‘The rise in joblessness has largely been a consequence of the government’s efforts to protect workers’ (Guest 2004:223).

Rodrik adds another level, stating that:

While the proximate cause of high unemployment is that prevailing wages levels are too high, the deeper cause lies elsewhere, and is intimately connected to the inability of the South African government to generate much growth momentum in the past decade. High unemployment and low growth are both ultimately the result of the shrinkage of the non-mineral tradable sector since the early 1990s. The weakness in particular of export-oriented manufacturing has deprived South Africa from growth opportunities as well as from job creation at the relatively low end of the skill distribution (Rodrik 2007: 1 unpublished).

These two arguments give an indication of the complexity of the problem and although it may seem like a string of dry numbers, within these statistics live the street musicians we pass on South Africa’s streets. This problem has a direct and critical impact on all the street performers introduced during the course of this thesis and as previously stated, almost every interviewee expressed concern about South Africa’s unemployment challenges. A number of them talk of worrying about not being able to ‘feed their children’, which gives a clear idea of how *immediately* this situation affects them.

A perspective from the V&A Waterfront

An informal interview with Vincent Magobiyane and observations surrounding a performance by the African Dream Marimba Band⁹ at the V&A Waterfront in Cape Town. 24 September 2007. The weather is sunny and warm.

He is struggling to answer the question; I have asked how his life circumstances impact on his music. ‘This is from my perspective... but I’m talking for them as well’, he indicates the rest of the band with a wave of his hand and then falls back into thoughtful silence. Vincent Magobiyane and I are sitting on a bench. Around us well-dressed tourists and onlookers in sun-hats watch as the Africa Dream Marimba Band unpack their instruments and prepare for a performance.

We are sitting in the heart of the V&A Waterfront complex. A little further down the promenade is a five star hotel, a few meters behind us begins a line of

⁹ The composition (instruments and number and type of musicians) of the African Dream Marimba Band will be described in detail in chapter three.

expensive restaurants where one can enjoy fresh langoustines and crayfish¹⁰ with a glass of chardonnay. The building behind us is a shopping mall, which caters only for the very affluent shopper; Prada and Gucci, amongst others have boutique stores'



inside .

'I mean it's everything.

Everything that happens around us. The problems that the country is facing and things that... we get inspired by what we see'. Vincent looks at me earnestly. He is not referring to the reality of the ice-cream eating crowds around us, he is referring to where he and the rest of his band live, Guguletu township.

He wants to sing of the wider problems that his country is facing, because unlike the tourists who wander around only the most beautiful sections

of this city and whom he is here to entertain, he cannot forget the cares of his daily life. He must travel every day from one world to another, acutely aware of how different they are, in order to collect the small change from the one to feed him in the other. And yet he remains positive, a professional triumphing over incredible odds.

'When you wake up and you just go and bang those instruments...and I swear that is how we create a song. If something is happening, if something is going on in our township, things that we are not happy with, we always try and put that message forward... you know?' He shrugs and smiles warmly at me.

From the inside-sleeve of the self-produced audio CD *Emotions Vol 2.*, sold next to the collection box of the African Marimba Band:

This Album (...) is a celebration of life, and represents the hope of the people for the future. To be quite honest it also represents the rough, tough journey we have travelled in our musical journey.

¹⁰ The South African equivalent of rock lobster – a very expensive luxury dish that is described on the *Condé Nast Traveller* website as 'world famous'. South Africa, *Condé Nast Traveller* http://www.cntraveller.com/Guides/South_Africa/ (Accessed: 12 August 2008).

Crime

Not all South Africans remain as positive and are prepared to be as constructive in their outlook. I would not have been surprised if Vincent had been frustrated, bitter and desperate, in fact I find it more surprising that he isn't. Robert Guest (2004: 225) tells the more common story:

Those with no other means of earning a living sometimes turn to crime. Joblessness can lead to alienation, and poverty gives people an incentive to steal. With guns easily available, plenty of rich people worth robbing and a tradition of revolutionary violence that dates back to the days when the ANC called for the townships to be made 'ungovernable', you would expect South Africa to be a dangerous place. It is.

Crime in South Africa, affecting everyone, not just the wealthy, is a seemingly unstoppable plague of destruction. In 2001 the Crime and Justice Programme of the Institute for Security Studies (ISS)¹¹ published a paper by Martin Schönteich and Antoinette Louw entitled: 'Crime in South Africa: A country and cities profile'.¹² In this paper they suggest possible reasons for the explosion of criminal activity in South Africa.

Levels of recorded crime in South Africa began to increase in the mid-1980s — dramatically so in the early 1990s. Expectations that violent crime would decrease after 1994 have not materialised. While levels of recorded crime stabilised between 1995 and 1996,¹³ crime has been increasing since then. The annual increase in the overall number of recorded crimes was greater in 1999 than in any previous year after 1994. Violent crimes increased at a greater rate than the total over this period (Schönteich & Louw 2001).

Their introduction indicates how broadly this problem is spread:

At greatest risk of becoming victims of interpersonal violent crime are the young, the poor and township residents. Conversely, middle-aged and wealthy suburban residents have a greater than average chance of being victims of serious property crimes. The risk of violent crimes aimed at property such as robbery and car hijacking is fairly evenly spread throughout the population (Schönteich & Louw 2001).

¹¹ The Institute for Security Studies (ISS) <http://www.iss.co.za/> (Accessed: 12 August 2008). According to the University of Cape Town Criminology Department the ISS keeps as close an eye on crime statistics as is possible for them to do. The ISS is a regional research institute that is a non-profit trust operating across sub-Saharan Africa.

¹² Crime and Justice Programme of the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), 'Crime in South Africa: A country and cities profile' Occasional paper no. 49, 2001, by Martin Schönteich and Antoinette Louw <http://www.iss.co.za/Pubs/PAPERS/49/PAPER49.HTML> (Accessed: 20 August 2008).

¹³ 'During the first three years after South Africa's political transition in 1994, overall crime levels stabilised, albeit at very high levels of especially violent crime' (Schönteich & Louw 2001).

It is important to note that what this paper indicates and what very quickly became apparent from informal conversations with street musicians and others who live in townships, is how real the threat of violent crime is in these areas. The paper also gives an indication of how violent crime in South Africa compares to other nations:

By global standards, South Africa has high levels of violent crime. In 1999, a third of all crimes recorded by the police in South Africa were violent in nature. In the United States, which is considered to be a relatively violent society, 15% of recorded crimes are violent, while about 6% of recorded crimes in the United Kingdom are violent in nature (Schönteich & Louw 2001).

Some of the reasons Schönteich and Louw suggest for this unexpected and destructive situation are: that South Africa is undergoing a destabilising period of transition, that prior to 1994 South Africa had a long history of having a 'culture of violence', that there is a proliferation of firearms throughout South African society, that organised crime syndicates are on the increase and that South Africa has a youthful population that is undergoing rapid urbanisation (Schönteich & Louw 2001). These writers have attempted to give a clear picture of the period following the 1994 elections up to 2001, but how has the situation developed since then?

On 14 August 2008 the headline of the *Cape Times* newspaper read 'Minister's crime bombshell'. Reporting on a review by Deputy Justice Minister Johnny de Lange the opening paragraph of the leader story by Boyd Webb (political bureau) reads:

The criminal justice system was unacceptably dysfunctional, and the 'fragmented' and inadequate crime statistics did not necessarily reflect the true situation in the country, the government has admitted (Webb 2008: 1).

After describing how few cases are successfully tried, and how very difficult it is to get a clear picture of the severity of the actual situation (due to inaccurate and therefore deceptive statistics) the article states: 'The findings of the review of the criminal justice system apparently shocked ministers and had President Thabo Mbeki practically offering a blank cheque for reforms' (Webb 2008: 1).

The Deputy Minister's deep frustration at the chronic problem that he sees worsening in South Africa is evident:

De Lange said that no one could say how many cases were being finalised. The government had been trying to fix crime and related problems 'with Band-Aid'.
'No one can tell you actually what the system is.'

‘Just at a technological level, to take us out of the Stone Age and bring us maybe into the 20th century – not even the 21st century, where many other countries are – it’s going to take a huge effort and huge... numbers to get those IT systems...and statistics bases’ (Webb 2008: 3).

I have used this article as a barometer to show the extent to which this problem has worsened since 2001. The Deputy Minister’s emotional response and the dramatic measures that are now being contemplated indicate a situation that puts South Africa firmly on the short list of the most dangerous countries in the world. Alarming, exactly where on this list, is difficult to determine.

The state also plans to double the number of detectives and increase their salaries. ‘Do the maths. Take all the crime – there are two million reported crimes a year – and add all the crime from previous years and you say to 20, 000 (detectives), “This is your baby”,’ said De Lange (Webb 2008: 3).

Xenophobia

Crime continues to impact on everyone, but a particularly grisly and distressing manifestation of local crime that predominantly affects those living and working in townships, are xenophobic attacks. The far-reaching effects of the vicious attacks that flared in Alexandria township in Johannesburg in May 2008, and that spread like a virus across large parts of the country, are ongoing. Many, including Archbishop Desmond Tutu, warn that this is just a different symptom of the same set of social ills overviewed above.

In an article in the *Weekend Argus* (24 May 2008) the journalist Justine Gerardy quotes Archbishop Tutu and writes:

‘Are we not building up much resentment that we may rue later?’ Tutu charged in the 2004 annual Nelson Mandela Memorial lecture. ‘Many, too many, of our people live in gruelling, demeaning, dehumanising poverty. We are sitting on a powder keg.’

The big bang may have just happened. It took South Africans just two weeks to kill nearly 50 people, displace 15 000 others, and get images of their burning, bloodied and terrified victims into the international spotlight (Gerardy 2008: 19).

Overview—still a long walk

Viewed in combination, the social and economic problems discussed in this chapter clearly show how difficult, how potentially dangerous and how unstable an existence many South African street musicians, particularly those of whom are township dwellers, must lead. After this overview of where South Africa currently stands, particularly in relation to the poorer members of its society, the closing words

of former president Nelson Mandela's autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom* (1994) seem crucially relevant and sadly prophetic:

When I walked out of prison, that was my mission, to liberate the oppressed and the oppressor both. Some say that has now been achieved. But I know that that is not the case. The truth is that we are not yet free; we have merely achieved the freedom to be free, the right not to be oppressed. We have not taken the final step of our journey, but the first step on a longer and even more difficult road. For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others (Mandela 1994: 617).

The weather

Despite the difficulties inherent in living and working in South Africa for the street musician, there are some relative benefits; the street performer who can make a street in a South African city his stage is usually very fortunate with the weather. This is a more important statement than might at first be supposed, as the physical environment that the street performer works within plays a significant role in his success. Here I will take a broader look at South Africa's general climate and weather patterns, focussing on key tourist leisure destinations, where the majority of this study was conducted.

South Africa covers an area of 1,222,081 sq km (471,845 sq mi)¹⁴ and the lower section of the African continent, and as a whole its climate is fairly mild.¹⁵ Extending from 22 ° S to 35 ° S (the continent's most southerly tip being at Cape Agulhas), most of the country falls within a temperate climatic zone with only the most northern lowlying areas becoming tropical.¹⁶ According to a summation of South Africa's climate on the BBC weather website this is because: 'Much of the interior consists of extensive high plains, known in South Africa as 'veld', with an altitude between 900 m /3,000 ft and 1,800 m /6,000 ft'.¹⁷ And this higher altitude modifies and flattens out the country's interior temperatures. Along the coast, where many of the more popular tourist leisure destinations are situated, the weather can be more variable. 'The southern part of South Africa is sufficiently far south to be

¹⁴ Cape Town, BBC Weather http://www.bbc.co.uk/weather/world/city_guides/results.shtml?tt=TT000580 (Accessed: 14 August 2008).

¹⁵ BBC Weather <http://www.bbc.co.uk/weather/> (Accessed: 14 August 2008). South Africa, BBC Weather http://www.bbc.co.uk/weather/world/country_guides/results.shtml?tt=TT000580 (Accessed: 14 August 2008).

¹⁶ Along the borders of Mozambique and Zimbabwe: South Africa, BBC Weather http://www.bbc.co.uk/weather/world/country_guides/results.shtml?tt=TT000580 (Accessed: 14 August).

¹⁷ South Africa, BBC Weather http://www.bbc.co.uk/weather/world/country_guides/results.shtml?tt=TT000580 (Accessed: 14 August 2008).

influenced in winter by weather disturbances associated with the belt of westerly winds in the southern ocean'.¹⁸ This article goes on to say that: 'For this reason a small portion of the southwestern Cape Province, below the Great Escarpment, has a Mediterranean type of climate with mild, changeable winters, during which most of the annual rainfall occurs, and a warm to hot, sunny summer.'¹⁹

During the summer months (November to February), Cape Town's average maximum temperatures range between 23 and 26 degrees Celcius, and they don't drop below an average of between 13 to 16 degrees.²⁰ Many of the international tourists who will travel to Cape Town during this period will have come out of the northern hemisphere winter, and for them this temperature is very warm and pleasant. Giving a performance on the street in Cape Town during this period can be very comfortable considering the alternatives. Summer heat can occasionally reach above 30 degrees, but this would be nothing compared to the discomfort of busking in Prague in the Czech Republic in winter, with maximum temperature being around zero (with an average of 2 sunshine hours per day)²¹ or in Dar Es Salaam in Tanzania, where the average high in summer, coupled with very high humidity, is 31 degrees.²²

The South Africa Weather Service gives the average number of days per month that Cape Town has rain during its summer months as between five and six²³ and, assuming that rain cancels a day of work for the street performer, that is not a financially damaging average.

It is not just temperature and rainfall that have an impact on street performers, the number of sunshine hours play an important role as well. The coastal city of Cape Town averages between 10 and 11 sunshine hours per day during its summer months

¹⁸ This article also points out that the climate in these coastal areas is influenced by the currents that flow along it: 'The eastern shores of southern Africa are warmed by the Agulhas current, which flows southwards from tropical latitudes; while the western shores are cooled by the Benguela current, flowing northwards from the cold southern ocean surrounding Antarctica' South Africa, BBC Weather http://www.bbc.co.uk/weather/world/country_guides/results.shtml?tt=TT000580 (Accessed: 14 August 2008).

¹⁹ South Africa, BBC Weather http://www.bbc.co.uk/weather/world/country_guides/results.shtml?tt=TT000580 (Accessed: 14 August 2008).

²⁰ Cape Town, BBC Weather http://www.bbc.co.uk/weather/world/city_guides/results.shtml?tt=TT000580 (Accessed: 14 August 2008).

²¹ Prague, BBC Weather http://www.bbc.co.uk/weather/world/city_guides/results.shtml?tt=TT003480 (Accessed: 14 August 2008).

²² Dar Es Salaam, BBC Weather http://www.bbc.co.uk/weather/world/city_guides/results.shtml?tt=TT000670 (Accessed 14 August 2008).

²³ Cape Town South African Weather Service (<http://www.weathersa.co.za/>) <http://www.weathersa.co.za/Climat/Climstats/CapeTownStats.jsp> (Accessed: 14 August 2008).

and peak tourist season.²⁴ Even if the weather isn't perfectly warm, if the sun is shining a performer is in a better position than not and the article cited above concludes by saying: 'In few parts of South Africa are the weather and climate unhealthy or likely to cause great discomfort or stress. Daily sunshine hours are high over most of the country, averaging eight to ten hours a day around the year.'²⁵

Throughout the rest of this thesis the observable weather conditions for each case study event will be included in the preliminary description.

Living in an aural environment

As well as the challenges presented by their social and physical environment, street musicians in South Africa are also influenced by their fluctuating aural environment. An aural environment is an insidious one. Unlike one's eyes, one cannot just 'shut ones ears', and so every day they are exposed to music: radio, television (including satellite channels such as MTV and VH1), mobile telephones, the internet, movies, recorded music (listened to in the form of CDs, DVDs, LPs or tapes) and live music. Whether travelling in minibus taxicabs, watching television, shopping, attending a funeral, listening to the radio, hearing the ring-tone of a mobile phone, going to a concert, or through a multitude of other ways, South African street musicians are purposefully or inadvertently exposed to music other than their own.

This music consists of both imported, international music and locally produced music. Listening to imported music, whether consciously or not, teaches the local street musician what might be part of some of his foreign audience's aural environment and therefore what will be familiar to them, at least to some of them. Whatever is topping the popular music charts in the USA or Europe is soon topping that of South Africa. This music, with its 'international' veneer is very influential.

Locally produced music, particularly popular and to a lesser extent, more 'traditional', is experiencing a surge in popularity and exposure. Over the last decade there has been a growing interest in locally produced music, but unfortunately, this has predominantly been confined to popular music, much of which is heavily

²⁴ Cape Town still has the relatively high number of an average of six sunshine hours per day during its wettest winter months. Cape Town, BBC Weather http://www.bbc.co.uk/weather/world/city_guides/results.shtml?tt=TT000580 (Accessed: 14 August 2008).

²⁵ South Africa, BBC Weather http://www.bbc.co.uk/weather/world/country_guides/results.shtml?tt=TT000580 (Accessed: 14 August 2008).

influenced by Europe and US popular music genres. Richard Nidel criticises this situation, controversially stating that:

South Africa possesses the most diverse (musical) culture in Africa, including the most vibrant recording scene. While much of South African music borrows from American Jazz, hip-hop and gospel, a rich folk tradition still exists based on the native Bantu languages including Sotho, Xhosa, and Zulu, and features one of the oldest 'call and response' repertoires in the world. (...) The changing political scene has paradoxically led to the stagnation of its modern musical evolution. The music is wallowing in derivative jazz, hip-hop, and soul, much like the United States. South Africa is no longer the musical powerhouse on the continent, a title that clearly belongs to West Africa at the start of the twenty-first century (Nidel 2005: 75).

Nidel's statements raise a question for further exploration later: if the South African recording industry is focussing its attentions elsewhere, and what he calls South Africa's 'folk tradition' is under threat, could South African street musicians be playing a role in traditional music's continued performance and preservation? They may be listening to locally produced South African popular music and being influenced by imported music, but they are encouraged by their audience—as will shortly be discussed—to focus on so-called 'traditional music'.

So who is the audience of a street performance? And why is this audience encouraging them in the direction of a more 'traditional' genre of music?

Tourism

What do tourists want? What would they like to see? What do they expect to hear? What counts as an attraction? What are they prepared to pay for? Which currency will they be mentally calculating their travel expenses in? Tourism is critical to the majority of street performers, and many of them are acutely aware of the answers to the above questions. A brief overview of tourism in South Africa will be discussed here, introducing some thoughts for further exploration.

In 2007 Cape Town was rated the world's eighth favourite city to visit by the participants of the *Condé Nast* Readers Choice Awards.²⁶ Before I examine South Africa's actual current tourism figures, I would like to look at the international *perception* represented by this award and others like it.²⁷ It is a significant indicator

²⁶ *Condé Nast* Traveller <http://www.cntraveller.com/> (Accessed: 12 August 2008).

²⁷ 2007 saw the highest number of voters contributing to the compilation of this list. 28 000 people voted and the results, which are released in New York, are watched and reported on by the international press. To be placed on this list carries with it great prestige and is a recognized accomplishment in the tourism industry.

when you take into account that Cape Town has climbed to this elevated position from being only 15th on this list in 2004.²⁸ This is quite a jump, and it places Cape Town at the number one ranking for Africa and the Middle East. Compared in the same set of awards, in the ‘countries category’, South Africa was rated at number 13 in the 2004 ranking of countries and in 2007 was placed at number six.²⁹ These placement movements are useful in that they are indicative of a change in South Africa’s international profile and they show a positive trend in world traveller perceptions of South Africa as a tourist destination.

This ranking and others similar to it, such as the ‘Guardian, Observer and Guardian Unlimited Travel Awards’,³⁰ show how South Africa’s image in the international press is increasingly one that encourages people to *believe* that South Africa, and particularly Cape Town, is an attractive and desirable place to visit and holiday. Those who have come here must, more often than not, return to their home countries with favourable reports to perpetuate this belief, and the brand of ‘South Africa’ is continually enhanced.³¹ Discussing this perceptual, positive sea change may appear to be a very vague starting point for looking at the impact that tourism has on street performers, but these ‘good feelings’ have a quantifiable result and a direct impact on South Africa’s street musicians.

Wandering through the inner city streets of Cape Town or the Waterfront, during the height of the tourist season (November to February) a myriad of different accents and languages catch the ear. From the perspective of the street performer the configuration of this influx is important, and so is its consistency. Perceptions about South Africa’s desirability as a tourist destination may waver, influenced by: political changes in South Africa and in its neighbouring states, changes in the local and international economy, social shifts (such as the recent outbreak of xenophobic attacks discussed above) and currency exchange rates, amongst others, but most of the street performers in this study were aware of the overall upward trend. The street performer is less impacted by smaller fluctuations, what is important is that he can

²⁸ Cities ranking results for 2007, *Condé Nast Traveller* <http://www.cntraveller.com/ReadersAwards/2007/Cities/> (Accessed: 20 August 2008).

²⁹ Countries ranking results for 2007, *Condé Nast Traveller* <http://www.cntraveller.com/ReadersAwards/2007/Countries/> (Accessed: 20 August 2008).

³⁰ The Guardian, Observer and Guardian Unlimited Travel Awards <http://www.guardian.co.uk/travel/2006/oct/07/travelawards2006?page=all> (Accessed 13 August 2008). In 2006 the travel awards ceremony was held in Cape Town.

³¹ The South African Tourism Association recently began to sponsor the weather on an international news network channel and was therefore seen everyday by many people around the world.

expect tourists again next season in *approximately* the same concentration. He may have a good season or a slightly less good one, but is the season profitable enough for him to continue, to return next season?

South African Tourism, the 'tourism marketing arm of the South African Government' (South African Tourism Index Q1 2008: 4), publishes a quarterly South African Tourism Index report.³² They distinguish between land markets, where over 60% of arrivals travel overland (these countries include Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Malawi, Namibia, Zambia, Swaziland and Zimbabwe) and air markets, where over 60% of visitors arrive by air. This is a distinction that I discovered was made by street performers as well. A tourist from Botswana, although still an international visitor, is much less of a valued audience member than one from Germany.

Total foreign arrivals in the quarter January to March 2008 were up by 11.9% to just under two and a half million visitors (South African Tourism Index Q1 2008:1).

In the Quarter ending March 2008 there were almost 2.5 million foreign arrivals, which is the highest number of arrivals ever recorded for the first quarter. This is an increase of 11.9% (264,625) compared to the same period in 2007. This is despite the anticipated softening of the international tourism demand in 2008, as forecast by UNWTO in its world tourism barometer (volume 7, June 2008) (South African Tourism Index Q1 2008:5).

The report also shows that there has been a steady increase in the number of arrivals since 2001 (1,428,075 visitors in the first quarter of 2001 to 2,490,248 arrivals in 2008) and that this quarterly growth rate is speeding up (South African Tourism Index Q1 2008: 7). Over 50% of these visitors come for a holiday or to visit friends and relatives (South African Tourism Index Q1 2008: 28), tourists arriving by air stay longer than those arriving by land (South African Tourism Index Q1 2008: 37) and 93% of visitors will be 'shopping' as a primary activity on their trip (South African Tourism Index Q1 2008:49). The remainder of the very detailed information included in this report is less relevant but it is interesting to note that it goes to great pains to describe and validate its data collection processes, and would paint a very positive picture for the South African street performer.

³² South African Tourism <http://www.southafrica.net/satourism/> (Accessed 2 Feb 2008). South African Tourism Index (Q1 2008) <http://www.southafrica.net/satourism/research/viewResearchDocument.cfm?ResearchDocumentID=479> (Accessed 26 August 2008).

Is the customer always right?

Tourist productions – the settings, events, and artefacts created for tourists – and their marketing constitute the most elaborated and expressive mode of communication in the entire tourism system (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett & Bruner 1992:302).

It has been established that South Africa is attractive to tourists and that they are arriving in ever increasing numbers, but this is not enough. They must also be willing to spend money, and it is this (often unspoken) financial negotiation between performer and tourist that forms a key part of the ‘elaborate mode of communication’ that Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Bruner are referring to in the above citation. It has already been established how critical a favourable outcome is for the average South African street performer, but this negotiation must also be examined from the perspective of the average foreign tourist visiting South Africa. This discussion naturally highlights the reasons that street performers would often far rather expend energy and time courting foreign tourists than local ones.

The *Condé Nast* website claims that international travellers perceive South Africa as providing good value for money. Predominantly because of the South African rand exchange rate,³³ even those international tourists who would fall into lower income groups in their own countries find prices in South Africa comparatively affordable. If one is paying a month’s salary for one’s next restaurant meal then one might not be prepared to spend on luxury, if however one feels as if everything is inexpensive, then it is easier to be generous. Quite obviously tourists are also on holiday and therefore are perhaps feeling more relaxed, experiencing less time pressure and are prepared to spend even more than they usually would on items and experiences that make them feel good.

All of these simple and self-evident factors seemingly combine to create an ideal potential audience member for a street performer, but the communication between performer and tourist is more complex than it first appears.

The falling value of the rand, as well as the recent and significant worldwide fluctuations in petrol price, have an impact on local tourists as well. Intercity and inter-provincial travel has become less affordable and coupled with the rising price in food, this discourages local tourist spending. So, if it is a financially prudent decision

³³ On the 25 August 2008 the rand to America dollar exchange rate was R7.725 = \$1. The rand to pound exchange rate was R14.3585 = £1 (Exchange). The rand to euro exchange rate was R11.4353 to one euro. XRates.com <http://www.x-rates.com/d/ZAR/table.html> (Accessed 25 August 2008).

to focus one's energy on the section of the buying public who are most likely and able to value one's product, then surely street performers in South Africa would do well to concentrate on the foreign tourists they are able to attract? Surely it would also be a smart choice to provide a product that they would find interesting and exotic? Is this the case? Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Edward M. Bruner in their article on tourism state that:

As the industry supports increasing numbers of tourists, particularly westerners, in economically depressed areas (...) hosts come to depend on tourism as a major source of income and hard currency. In many regions tourism has become the number one source of foreign exchange (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett & Bruner 1992: 301).

The Abonwabisi Brothers are a choral group who perform in the V&A Waterfront in Cape Town. They are Xhosa, but they perform using a largely Zulu *isicathamiya* style of singing.³⁴ They are proficient and entertaining performers, beautifully dressed in colourful matching costumes, they use a very expressive storytelling style of performance, switching easily between different South African languages. During the summer tourist season the Abonwabisi Brother's audience includes many foreign tourists who would like to believe that what they are witnessing is an 'authentic' performance. They have perhaps arrived in Cape Town having heard what they believed to be 'African' music in their home countries.

³⁴ This style of performing will be described, discussed and explained in chapter five.



The Abonwabisi Brothers

The Abonwabisi Brothers have intentionally modelled themselves, their music and their performance on the internationally well-known group Ladysmith Black Mambazo.³⁵ The opening sentence on the Ladysmith Black Mambazo website reads: ‘Ladysmith Black Mamabazo has come to represent the traditional culture of South Africa in the eyes of many music fans worldwide.’³⁶ The opening sentence in the inside cover of the self-produced audio CD that the Abonwabisi Brothers sell alongside their collection box is: ‘We began singing together in 1997 drawing our inspiration from the very famous local band ‘Ladysmith Black Mambazo’.’ This puts them firmly within a genre of music that their international audience will very likely have heard before. It is a recognisable sound that is easily perceived as an authentic South African experience.

I am going to assume, for the purposes of illustrating this argument, that the Abonwabisi Brothers are choosing to play to their most economically viable audience. They might be assuming that their foreign audience has travelled a long way and they

³⁵ Ladysmith Black Mambazo shot to fame when they were included on the album *Graceland* by the artist Paul Simon. Information, Ladysmith Black Mambazo <http://www.ladysmithblackmambazo.com/information.htm> (Accessed 25 August 2008). Written on their information page: ‘It has been more than fifteen years since Paul Simon made his initial trip to South Africa and met Joseph Shabalala and the other members of Ladysmith Black Mambazo in a recording studio in Johannesburg. (...) Simon incorporated the traditional sounds of black South Africa into the "Graceland" album, a project regarded by many as seminal to today's explosive interest in World Music.’

³⁶ Ladysmith Black Mambazo, <http://www.ladysmithblackmambazo.com/> (Accessed 25 August 2008).

wish to hear not just something local to the area that they have chosen to travel to, but something that they perceive to be genuinely 'authentic'. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Bruner suggest that tourists are always looking for the authentic (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett & Bruner 1992: 303). 'The preoccupation with the authentic is a culturally and historically specific phenomenon' (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett & Bruner 1992: 303).

Who doesn't want to feel that they have seen the real thing, been allowed into the perceived inner circle or 'backstage with the band'? Many tourists are not interested in hearing (sometimes poor) renditions of the styles of music they hear at 'home'. One might suggest that the Abonwabisi Brothers could plausibly be assuming that the majority of this tourist-based audience is fairly ignorant about South African music. They can be duped. But Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Bruner (1992: 304) continue by saying: 'The issue is therefore less one of authenticity and more one of authentication; who has the power to represent whom and to determine which representation is authoritative?'

So might these assumptions push the Abonwabisi Brothers towards performing more traditional forms of South African music, those that are easily recognisable as such? Bruno Nettl writes that: 'In their consumption of music, tourists usually hope for something authentic, old, explicitly non-Western or noncanonic: but also they want to be entertained by something they can tolerate in the context of their Western musical tastes' (Nettl 2005: 194). The Abonwabisi Brothers have chosen a well-known style of South African traditional music so that their performance repertoire is exotic, and yet not alien. The Abonwabisi Brothers might themselves be Xhosa, and playing a Zulu style of music, but they rely on their audience's ignorance not to find this problematic.

As has already been discussed, tourists are seasonal. They are an expected audience, returning every season, so what impact does this have? Do tourists encourage street performers to fake it, or tweak it to fit a little better to a perceived South African template? Or is it possible that street performers, encouraged by foreign financial appreciation, might be playing a role in keeping traditional music alive in South Africa? As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Bruner state: 'In tourist productions symbol takes precedence over information' (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett & Bruner 1992: 302). Maybe it also encourages street musicians to add elements that would provide hooks for the right kind of foreign passer-by; The African Dream

Marimba band sometimes plays ‘Mbube’,³⁷ a very well-known melody, as a warm up and they also intersperse other familiar western tunes into their sets.

Before expanding this discussion through the next chapters I would like to tentatively draw two conclusions, which will be verified as this argument develops. Firstly, for those street musicians who are lucky enough to be able to travel to areas where there will be tourists, foreigners will have a *critical influence* on the types of acts they decide to create and perform. Secondly, tourists are very encouraging of street music. Therefore if the South African tourism industry continues to see rising numbers of international tourists, it is probable that there will be a commensurate increase in street performers, particularly performing more traditional forms of South African music.

The consequences of tourism – processes of production and representation of culture for outsiders, interactions between local people and more affluent visitors, and economic and social impacts – offer fertile areas for study (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett & Bruner 1992: 300).

³⁷ Composed by Solomon Linde, subsequent versions of this song have been released by different artists, under different names; it is also known as ‘Wimoweh’ or the ‘Lion Sleeps Tonight’.

Chapter Three

The Street

The word ‘street’ has many associations and meanings attached to it. In this chapter a working definition of ‘street music’ will be suggested, including which physical areas or locations this definition will encompass. Various case studies will be used to demonstrate different types of street music, being performed on different types of street and through this examination, show the unique characteristics of these physical spaces as performance environments. Two of these characteristics will be focussed on; Firstly that the audience can move around or away at any moment during a performance and, secondly that the street is an undefined, mostly open-air performance space. After looking at the various restrictions that different streets impose on the performers who work there, we will then examine how this complex and interestingly constructed environment creates what I will call a ‘street psych’ to arise in both the performer and their audience.

This chapter will highlight:

- That how the street is constructed, perceived and defined as far more than just a physical space, creates powerful and influential connotations.
- That the street is a unique performance environment for two key reasons:
 1. The audience can move around or away at any time.
 2. Street performers work outdoors in an undefined performance space.
- Different types of street environment have different restrictions and difficulties attached to them.
- These different characteristics and connotations combine to create a ‘street psych’, which can cause both performers and audiences to create and conceptualise ‘location’ differently.

Discovering the street

Grahamstown.¹ 4 July 2007. The weather is clear and sunny, without being warm.

I'm standing on a street corner watching a man playing a drum. All the streets leading away from this intersection are completely covered with impromptu stalls. Plastic sheeting, laid almost end-to-end upon the ground, is covered with every conceivable object for sale. There are rows of boxes of fruit, waving strings of plastic, rip-off sunglasses, sausages and onions sizzling in portable gas-fired pans, and curio tables, all divided up with curtains of brightly coloured fabric. The man playing the drum has wedged himself between two of these stalls. He is crouched low over his instrument, underneath a peaked cap and sunglasses, and hasn't looked up once all the time I have been watching him. It is as if he is hiding, not wanting to be seen, and yet he is playing very well and very loudly. Around him the market vendors ignore him and he seems oblivious of them.

The Eastern Cape town of Grahamstown, during its annual Arts Festival, is a bustling, lively place. Weaving in between the vendors and pedestrians, street children, their faces ghostly with white paint, pretend to be mime artists in the hope of a few coins.

This is the second time I have seen this lone drummer today. The previous time he was sitting on a low, stone wall, holding his drum loosely in his arms, watching me. But then I was interviewing another group of singers, who had just finished their performance, and when I moved towards him, to talk to him, he quickly took his drum, put his head down, and melted into the thick crowds.

Now, tucked away between the two stalls, he has no bowl or plate in front of him and he is difficult to see. With clearly no desire to collect money from the passers-by, he seems to be just playing for himself, an unseen source of rhythm to accompany the movements of the thronging crowds. I stay well back, enjoying his drumming and conceding defeat. He has no wish to speak to me, and he becomes 'Drummer X' in my notes.

Finally moving away, I can barely push along the pavement through the hundreds of people and every lamppost or pole and wall is plastered with posters advertising the many theatrical, artistic and musical productions that the festival showcases. But I am not here for the formal programme of events. Easing my way

¹ The University town of Grahamstown is situated in the Eastern Cape Province.

through the milling crowd down onto the Church Square, I am listening. Because the best way to find street performers in a busy town, is to listen.

What is a street?

‘Drummer X’ made me wonder. If not performing for money, what was he doing there? Perhaps more interestingly, what was ‘the street’ for him? A performance space? A free, unrestricted space for self-expression, away from the judgement of those known to him? A practice space to perfect his craft, with the benefit of a partly interested audience? Or a hiding place, both within his own generated sound and within the anonymity of the crowd? Schuyler, when writing about the street performances of the *rwais*, professional Berber musicians, describes them as meeting ‘(...) their audience on neutral territory’ (Schuyler 1984: 96). But I cannot agree, the street seems anything but ‘neutral territory’.

Firstly streets are physical spaces. They are thoroughfares for the movement of people and traffic, and they come in many different types: boulevards, avenues, cul-de-sacs, main streets, frontage roads, side streets, two-way and one-way streets, walkways, single-track roads, back roads, driveways etc. They can be tarred or cobbled or just scraped dirt. A street can have pavements and trees and run through a heaving metropolis, or just be a country track connecting intermittent buildings in a remote town. But the street is not just a functional physical construct. Throughout history human beings have placed great symbolic value on the concept of a street.

Reading through the various definitions listed under ‘street, *n*’ in the *Oxford English Dictionary* gives a clear indication of how diversely different people conceptualise this manmade space. Amongst the various meanings the entry describes are; ‘A road in a town or village (comparatively wide, as opposed to a ‘lane’ or ‘alley’), running between two lines of houses; usually including the side-walks as well as the carriageway. Also, the road together with the adjacent houses.’² The fame of certain streets and their symbolism has added new meanings to the concept as well, for example;

the street: some particular street to which the merchants or financiers of a city resort for business intercourse. In mod. use primarily *U.S.* (with cap.), applied to Wall Street, New York. Hence, the money market; the body of persons

² ‘Street, *n.*’, *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (<http://www.oed.com/>) <http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/display/50239141?keytype=ref&ijkey=DNqtncN9rkQw>.

who conduct transaction in stock and shares. Also, in London, *in the street* is said with reference to business done or prices quoted after the hour of closing of the Stock Exchange.

Fleet Street, where various newspapers have their headquarters in London, is another example of a famous street that has become synonymous with a definition of 'the street'. Various other meanings in the *Oxford English Dictionary* include: 'to be on the streets: to be a prostitute. Hence, *the street(s)* as designating a life of prostitution.'

'on the streets (Sc.): turned out of doors, homeless.'

'the street (U.S. slang): the world outside prison or other confinement, freedom.'

'the man in (also U.S. on) the street: the ordinary man, as distinguished from the expert or the man who has special opportunities of knowledge. Similarly *the woman in the street*.'

'to play or work both sides of the street (orig. and chiefly U.S.): to ally oneself with both sides, to behave inconsistently and opportunistically.'

'to be up (down, in) one's street: to be suited to someone's taste or ability.'

All these definitions combine to create a popular understanding, a metaphorical sense of what and where the street is. It becomes far more than the gap left between buildings so that we, and our goods, may pass by. The street becomes a multifaceted, multi-layered, imaginary environment running parallel to the actual streets we walk. It extends much further and is far more inclusive than the restrictions of its physical space. We talk about 'street culture', 'street fashion', 'street clothing', 'street poetry', 'street cred.' (slang for credibility) and we generally understand these things to share particular characteristics. So to truly understand the street as a performance environment and as an influential initial reception frame, I believe that it is important to have explored the implications of both the imaginary and the actual physical street.

Starting to define 'street music'

For the purposes of this study, a workable starting point is needed to discuss the street in terms of a performance environment. With this in mind I would like to suggest that we begin by simply understanding 'street music' to be: music which is informally performed in public places, often—although not always—for money. This definition of 'street' would then include market places, sidewalks, piers, squares,

parks, subways, and *all* other public places where music could potentially be performed for money and, from this position, we can now begin to answer questions such as: How do the musicians themselves, like Drummer X, conceptualise ‘the street’? Are the streets and public places purely an alien, disconnected, somewhat uncomfortable market environment where existing musical traditions are brought, displayed and ‘sold’? Does this shifting urban landscape cause musicians to create a separate, more saleable ‘musical identity’ (a question that was raised in chapter two)? And is there a defined communal understanding between those who live and work there?

Further on down the street

Observations surrounding a performance by the Ubuntu Cultural Dancers led by Vuyani Mtwazi (six girls, three youths and Vuyani himself - the girls dance, sing and play drums and the youths sing and drum)³ at the bottom of Church Square, Grahamstown. The late morning on 4 July 2007. The weather is clear and sunny, without being warm.



The Ubuntu Cultural Dancers

I can hear the applause of the large crowd before I can see them. In fact, the crowd is so big that, by the time I have eased my way through to a position where I can watch as well as listen, the Ubuntu Cultural Dancers are

already nearing the end of their set. Vuyani is well back, just giving support on his jembe.⁴ He has positioned the group at the bottom of Church Square, at the

³ The Ubuntu Cultural Dancers consists of 12 performers in total, but the number will vary for different performances.

⁴ ‘Large-headed, mobile drum with a narrow stem played with hands. Usually accompanied by double-headed barrel-shaped drums, played with sticks’ (Dagan 1993: 211).

‘Jembe’, Eric Charry, *Grove Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com:80/subscriber/article/grove/music/42013>.

crowd breaks into ringing applause and coins are tossed onto the square of animal skin that serves as their collection plate.

The journey to this moment has been hard and they have travelled a long way to be here. But for these few minutes it has all come together, and Vuyani looks happy.

The Ubuntu Cultural Dancers are professional street performers. They have been together since 2004, and there are twelve of them in total now, although that number has fluctuated over the years.

‘We are from Port Elizabeth,’ Vuyani tells me. He is a very tall, slim, gentle looking man who chooses his words carefully. ‘We all live in Govan Mbeki.’⁵

Port Elizabeth is 130 kilometres away, over an hour’s drive from Grahamstown, so I ask him how they got here. ‘Oh,’ he waves his hand vaguely, perhaps embarrassed, ‘it is a long way, but when we can’t



Vuyani

As leader he must be composer, choreographer, poet and storyteller, and it is clear that he enjoys his work. His business partner and co-founder of the group, Nozuko Jack, is far less friendly, and far more forthcoming about the practicalities. She tells me she is also the chaperone for the girls in the troupe. ‘We sleep in the

A synchronised performance



catch a lift we hike.’ I understand that ‘hike’ is a less harsh way of telling me they walk. Walk along the highway from Port Elizabeth, carrying their bags and instruments. It is clear that he doesn’t really want to talk about this hardship. He would much rather talk about his music, so I ask what he views his role to be, as leader of the Ubuntu Cultural Dancers, and he lists his tasks, watching me carefully as I write them down. ‘You must not leave off choreographer; it is also important to tell stories.’

⁵ Govan Mbeki is a township situated just outside the seaside city of Port Elizabeth.

township here at night, all in one room,' she tells me. 'It is difficult. Especially for when we need to wash. And we must carry everything wherever we need to go.'

On a good day the Ubuntu Cultural Dancers will make R200 in total. This amount can only just cover food and the barest necessities for twelve people. Later on the same day I meet up with the group again. Vuyani is looking worried. They have not yet made enough for a meal and are getting hungry. 'We must play to eat,' he shrugs. And they begin to perform another set.

With freedom comes feedback

I have defined street music as 'music which is informally performed in public places, often—although not always—for money.' Vuyani and his group live at the sharp end of this definition. Daily they experience how fluid and fickle the street as a performance environment is, and they are directly impacted by the two defining characteristics introduced in the opening of this chapter. One of the most pivotal and important aspects of the street as a performance space is its *lack of containment*. I use the word 'pivotal' very deliberately as almost every aspect of a street musician's performance is influenced by this; all his choices of what to perform, how to play, what instruments to use, where to perform, how to dramatise or not dramatise and how to dress, present and conduct himself is impacted on by this characteristic. But why is this one aspect so influential?

Vuyani and his group *must* connect with their audience, and the only thread that they have to tie their audience to themselves is a delicate strand of *positive attention*. Catching and then holding onto the threads of attention of their crowd is the most vital first step in whether or not they will eat that night because, on the street, this thread is the *only* thing that creates an audience.

Lack of containment manifests in a number of ways: Firstly the street performer's audience is not constrained by having entered a predetermined observational area. They do not feel restricted by the social norms of behaviour that are expected in other, more formalised performance settings. A potential audience member is not temporally restricted either; they may walk towards or away from a street performance at any time. Hence the feedback that the performer receives is immediate; a large, enraptured crowd is indicative to the musicians that they are perceived to be providing value, and a dwindling, disinterested group of soon-to-be passers-by, the opposite.

Secondly, unlike a theatre, there is no clearly defined performance impact zone that will frame the audience member's impression of the performance. On the street a performance is neither anticipated, nor asked for, no tickets have been pre-booked, there is no opportunity for the listener to read through a programme beforehand and choose what he or she wishes to hear. There is also no carefully constructed publicity advantageously presenting the performance in advance.⁶

Thirdly, and on the flip side of the same coin, any sound that a street musician produces is not contained either. The street performer can spontaneously foist his performance upon an unsuspecting audience, whose most exercised option, should they not want to listen, is to walk away and move out of earshot (as they are free to do).

Fourthly the performer is free to choose what he wishes to perform. Not contained by a predetermined program, Vuyani is free to change his group's performance at any time, and he often does. Altering the order of the songs they will perform, pulling one dancer back, encouraging another to take her place, asking a drummer to play a solo or to quieten their enthusiasm. Vuyani constantly monitors and makes adjustments. He is at liberty to change his programme immediately and reflectively in response to his audience's response. Feedback can be used very effectively to hone the street performer's programme and therefore to meet his particular needs.

Ruth Finnegan, in a more general discussion of performed oral literature, highlights the pivotal role of immediate audience feedback. Her words are relevant and translatable to the uncontained performance template outlined above.

(...) (An) essential factor is the audience, which, as is not the case with written forms, is often directly and immediately involved in the actualisation and creation of a piece of oral literature.

(...) There is no escape for oral artists from a face-to-face confrontation with an audience, and this is something which they can exploit as well as be influenced by (Finnegan 2007:84).

Barring the municipal restrictions of the area the street performer is playing within, and relative to performers who operate in more formal performance settings, the street musician is fairly free to start and stop playing or singing at will. He is more or less at liberty to perform whatever suits his purposes; whether that be to make money, (as in Vuyani's case), to have an opportunity to express himself, (also in

⁶The disadvantages and advantages of this will be extensively explored in chapter four.

Vuyani's case and perhaps as Drummer X was doing) or just to practice his craft in a public environment, (again, perhaps as Drummer X was doing). But the street performer must always take into account that his audience is free to vote with their feet. So this freedom comes with feedback.

Out in the cold

Observations surrounding a performance by Mdu (playing an umtshingo⁷ and a shaker) at the V&A Waterfront in Cape Town. At night, on 20 July 2008. The weather is clear but very cold.

It is midwinter in Cape Town and the night sky may be clear, but this just makes the cold even more biting. I am surprised to see Mdu. He is sitting next to a walkway, cross-legged on a square of blanket, swaying rhythmically from side to side as he plays with his short dreadlocks flying around his head. In one hand he holds a shaker aloft, almost above his head, and with the other, a short curve of black rubber piping. Mdu holds this instrument, called an umtshingo, against his mouth and changes the direction of his blowing to create differently pitched notes. The breathy, jerky melody is beautiful, perhaps even more so because it comes out of the darkness. His instrument has a haunting, ancient-sounding timbre that stops the passers-by in their tracks. Another definition of the word umtshingo is 'a sweet, well-trained woman's voice' (Doke & Vilakazi 1990). I notice his audience are listening very quietly. The whistle of his breath through the pipe is so audible that it makes listening almost seem like an intimacy. But then again, perhaps it is the night playing tricks on his audience.

Despite the fierce cold, Mdu seems oblivious to his uncomfortable position on the hard ground. He looks young and strong, but he is a long way from the hot climate of KwaZulu Natal, which is where he comes from, and I wonder if the Cape Town winter makes him feel homesick. Maybe that is why he plays with his eyes shut.

The street as a physical space

The cold must force Mdu to be acutely aware of the street as a physical space, but this space encompasses more than just its temperature and the hard ground. The anthropologist James Holston, in an article consisting of excerpts from his urban

⁷ 'This is a length of piping, usually black rubber, which is cut at an angle of approximately 45 degrees across one end and then played as a wind instrument' (Doke & Vilakazi 1990).

design book *The Modernist City*, does not restrict his definition of city streets to just roads; but rather describes streets as any (public) space, including squares and open areas, that are encapsulated in-between buildings, and which are used for movement between these buildings. He poetically describes a city as ‘(...) a solid mass of contiguous buildings out of which the spaces for circulation are carved’ (Holston1999: 252). More interestingly he goes on to describe the street’s physical configuration:

The street is not, however, just a passage for traffic. Its space is only one element of a complex form. As an architectural configuration, the street comprises a space open to the sky and the physical frame that contains and shapes it, that is the facades of the buildings and a floor. The latter is usually paved and differentiated into two or more levels: the base level of the buildings and the roadway proper, at a lower level, the two being mediated by a third level of curb, sidewalk, and steps that differentiate the street into distinct but interpenetrating zones of activity. The interplay of the expansion of this floor and the height and character of the surrounding buildings gives the impression that the sky has a defined height. The street system of public spaces comprises all the elements of this architectural configuration (Holston1999:252).

Holston’s description not only gives a clear indication of the physical composition of this space, but also gives a sense of its stark and unforgiving nature. It is this three-dimensional space, with the open sky as it’s ceiling, that Mdu and any urban street musician, must make his stage. And this stage can be a very challenging physical performance context for the musician, as conditions are often harsh and unpredictable. The performer has to deal with uncomfortable temperatures, lack of shelter against rain and wind, no furniture, no privacy and security issues. There is no ‘green room’ in which to leave one’s valuables or store heavy items.

During a performance the busker is often distracted and pickpockets have their eye on both their belongings, and the money that is quite obviously being collected. The slang term for this thieving technique is ‘dipping’—when a thief walks swiftly past and appears to place a coin into the collection plate, but in actuality removes money. Street musicians use different techniques to combat this. Some, such as the Impala Cultural Group⁸ collect their money in a bag, which continuously hangs safely over one of their member’s shoulders. Others use an enclosed collection box that is

⁸ This group will be introduced in the following chapter.

easy to put money into, but difficult to remove it from. An example of this technique is Goodman's use of a slotted tin.⁹

As discussed in chapter two, the unpredictable and unsympathetic open sky is also problematic. Mdu is wearing warm clothes to protect himself, but other street performers such as the Ubuntu Cultural Dancers wear costumes that don't protect them from fluctuations in temperature. The girls in particular, dance as part of their performance, and therefore wear eye-catching and form revealing costumes to maximise their movements, and they complain of discomfort, particularly between performances. They cannot carry warmer clothes as they might get stolen while they perform, the clothes are bulky, too, and heavy to carry from one performance location to the next and it is too time consuming to keep changing. This group of twelve musicians needs to be able to pack up their props and instruments within seconds and move away, ready at anytime to put down their drums and begin performing again.

Street performers are at the mercy of whatever their current location's physical conditions are in a more important way than simply the impact on their own comfort. If the weather conditions are bad, it drives away their audience. Rarely does someone stop to listen to a street performance in the pouring rain, or the howling wind. If the weather is bad, or the conditions are uncomfortable, they might lose a day's earnings. I was surprised to see Mdu, not because *he* would be uncomfortable performing in the cold, but mostly because I would not expect there to be a large potential audience for him to be making money from in the cold of night.

Different types of streets—different types of restrictions

Goodman stands up from his box, opens it and carefully finds and takes out a piece of paper. He hands it me with something almost resembling pride and tells me that it has been signed by the Chief of Police. It reads:

Please do not
Remove
The Blind man
On sight.
He does not
Constitute
Any offence.

⁹ The 'collection plate', in its various forms will be further discussed in chapter four.

For the street musician there are different types of street, with different levels and types of restriction; the open street, the street within a gated community, the street within a transport system and the 'festival' street.

Mdu and the Abonwabisi Brothers have chosen to play in the V&A Waterfront. This is very large converted harbour complex, which includes: restaurants, hotels, business areas (suites), residential areas (in the form of clusters of apartment blocks), piers and several shopping malls. It has restricted access, allowing vehicles in through a number of gates, and can be described as a large gated community. The V&A Waterfront encourages and supports the street musicians who work within its grounds. Each must audition by supplying the V&A Waterfront administration with an audio recording of a collection of their music. After they have been accepted, they are included into a rotation schedule; each group or individual performer is allotted a set time for a particular location and, as the V&A Waterfront is very large, a number of different performers can be concurrently performing at different locations without overlapping or interfering with each other.

Mdu and the Abonwabisi Brothers count themselves as lucky to have secured a spot here. They are viewed as desirable tourist attractions and are therefore given a room to change in before and after their performances and they are encouraged to sell their audio CDs alongside their collections boxes. These boxes are provided by the Waterfront and are attractively made from wood with the V&A Waterfront insignia visible on the side. They benefit from the in-house security of the complex and have easy access to the high concentration of international tourists who are staying in or visiting the complex. The V&A Waterfront benefits from the musicians providing what has been deemed to be a suitable level and style of entertainment for their visitors. The street musicians prefer to work in a controlled, gated environment, with many of the hardships inherent in other street environments having been removed. It is a mutually beneficial arrangement.

The London Underground and the Barcelona Metro are also controlled street environments of a different sort. In 2007 it was announced that musicians who wished to perform in the Barcelona underground would now, like the Waterfront musicians, have to audition and 'demonstrate the quality and variety of their repertory'.¹⁰ 32 performance slots were made available and, once a street performer had secured a

¹⁰Busking, Wanted In http://barcelona.wantedineurope.com/news/news.php?id_n=3455 (Accessed: 27 August 2008).

slot, they would be required to pay a fee to join the AMUC (The Association of Street Musicians). The London Underground also requires its performers to audition and obtain a renewable licence.¹¹ These contained street environments impose restrictions. The quality of playing must be satisfactory and when and where within the environment the performer may play is predetermined. The volume of playing is also often tightly controlled.¹² But they also offer protection, an opportunity to play within an environment that might not be as difficult to manage physically as the open street (there is no rain in an underground station), and easy access to an audience.

Prime locations on the streets of Grahamstown during its annual arts festival are shared by a number of groups, of which the Ubuntu Cultural Dancers are but one. During festivals, fairs or other communal events the streets of a particular town or city change in nature. The atmosphere is more encouraging and appreciative of street musicians than at other times, and local authorities will be far more lenient—street musicians can add to a sense of occasion. Surprisingly, I noticed that a very informal rotation schedule seemed to have been agreed upon by these groups. Rather than competing and jostling for the best performance spots during the festival, the various groups collaborate. Keeping on the move, they change location regularly to keep interest, to catch new audience members, to keep the novelty effect of their various performances intact and, very occasionally, to stay one step ahead of the law. None of the street performers that I spoke to in Grahamstown were registered street performers; they are therefore given no protection by the festival organisers and so might be ousted by the local authorities or asked to move away at any moment.

Some municipalities, Cape Town city centre is an example, insist that street musicians only remain in one location for a predetermined period of time (usually half an hour). This is to protect those who cannot walk away. Shopkeepers in the near vicinity, for example, did not ask for, or choose, the music performed, and yet they cannot, as other members of the public can, simply move out of earshot. In many parts of the world street performing is either illegal, or has strict regulations attached to it, and local authorities will pursue and punish any who attempt to break these.¹³ In

¹¹ Busking, Transport for London <http://www.tfl.gov.uk/corporate/projectsandschemes/communityandeducation/2435.aspx> (Accessed: 27 August 2008).

¹² The Barcelona Metro will not allow amplifiers over 20 watts or loud percussion.

¹³ As noted in chapter one Internet sites for buskers are available that outline the different rules and regulations at different busking locations worldwide.

Galway in Ireland the police will stop players at midnight¹⁴ and in the town of Thubingen in Germany street performers may only play for twenty minutes before they are firmly asked to move to a new location.¹⁵ Interestingly, according to the musicians I spoke to, South African street musicians are mostly left alone by the authorities. The Ubuntu Cultural Dancers do not complain of harassment, apparently during the festival the authorities are fair. But then the Ubuntu Cultural Dancers come from out of town and will take what they can get, decamping when they have to. Vuyani does not cite the police as ever being problematic in that they are restrictive, but rather he softly complains that they offer little or no protection from crime and the misbehaviour of the public.

There is a reason that Goodman is so proud of his police protection; it is very valuable to him. He performs in the city centre on the open street, away from any of the benefits of a gated community, away from the leniency afforded during a festival or a special event, but his signed piece of paper guarantees his safety and his income. No one can move him, or chase him away, or stop him from doing his chosen job.

‘Street psych’

I am too young to grow a beard
But yes man it was me you heard
In dirty denim and dark glasses
I look through everyone who passes
But ask him clear, I do not plead
Keys lids acid speed.

Thom Gunn, ‘Street Song’, stanza 1 (1971:1305)

Thom Gunn’s hard-hitting poem is about a young drug dealer. An edgy, sleazy character, who sings the praises of the drugs he is peddling, as well as embodying the street he stands on. Gunn has created a symbolic street figure.

As well as the definitions that have already been explored earlier in this chapter, the street has pervading connotations. It is associated with crime, with rebelliousness, with drugs and gang-related activities. It is also associated with protest, with freedom and with antiauthoritarian acts, for example graffiti. South Africa’s streets in particular have long been powerfully symbolically associated with both violent and peaceful protest, as during the apartheid regime struggle leaders

¹⁴ Busking, Galway, Ireland, Stiff Arming Society <http://www.stiffarmingsociety.com/busking/galwayireland.htm> (Accessed: 27 August 2008).

¹⁵ My own experience.

famously called their supporters to ‘take to the streets’ (Mandela 1994).

Unfortunately, as discussed in chapter two, South Africa’s streets are also associated with dangerous crime and gang-related violence.

The now famous, but elusive, British graffiti artist Banksy is another example of a symbolic street figure.¹⁶ Using his art to shock, provoke, educate and comment, Banksy has built up a huge cult following, but he likes to remain as anonymous as possible. His anonymity protects not only his freedom, his access to his work environment and his ‘street cred.’, but perhaps also his own *conceptualisation* of the street. For him the street is a liberating protest space and artistic performance environment for him to be what he calls a ‘quality vandal’. Lauren Collins writing in the *New Yorker* (14 May 2007) describes how:

Having fashioned himself as a sort of painterly Publius, Banksy surfaces from time to time to prod the popular conscience. Confronted with a blank surface, he will cover it with scenes of anti-authoritarian whimsy: Winston Churchill with a Mohawk, two policemen kissing, a military helicopter crowned by a pink bow (Collins 2007).¹⁷

These rebellious, subversive associations have a long history and are relevant to every street musician. If one’s surroundings and appearance frame and to an extent define one to others, as shall be explored in the following chapter, then the street is a very potent brush to be tarred with. The *New Oxford Companion to Music* describes how: ‘Street musicians (other than the authorised waits) were suppressed by two Acts of Parliament of the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, they being declared rogues and vagabonds’ (Scholes & Gammond 1984: 1763).

The street is also therefore an emotive, imaginary construction. Kiri Miller, in an article published in the journal *Ethnomusicology* entitled ‘Jacking the dial: radio, race, and place in *Grand Theft Auto*’, outlines another mentally constructed space. This article is about the videogame series entitled *Grand Theft Auto* and in it Miller discusses: ‘dispersed players with shared reception frames’ (Miller 2007: 405). In her game world ethnography she looks at very diverse players, who take on a character for the purposes of navigating an imaginary, but shared frame of experience. I would like to suggest that in a more generalised sense, the street is a similar shared reception

¹⁶ Banksy <http://www.banksy.co.uk/> (Accessed: 27 August 2008) Photographs of some of the walls that Banksy has covered with his art are available at this site.

¹⁷ ‘Banksy was Here – The Invisible Man of Graffiti Art’ by Lauren Collins (14 May 2007) *The New Yorker* http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2007/05/14/070514fa_fact_collins?currentPage=all (Accessed: 27 August 2008).

frame. Like the internet, or like video games that can be played with different players from different parts of the globe, the street offers a physical *and* a conceptualised ‘location’ where very different people—whose paths might never normally cross—meet, interact and share experience. And, like in Miller’s video game, this shared reception frame creates a ‘psych’ that is only applicable in this created environment.

The street is associated with an atmosphere which encourages varying forms of ‘liberation’, or ‘rebelliousness’, and both performers and audience create a ‘street psych’ for themselves. Audience members who under other circumstances would never be rude, talk loudly through a performance, or walk right through a musician’s performance space. Street performers who under normal circumstances might be reticent, are liberated by their performing environment (that is filled with strangers) and can become prepared to perform provocative material in a controversial way. The street, running between buildings, between houses, encourages people to run between regular social restrictions. But how does the street musician manage this complex, multi-dimensional environment to his advantage?

Chapter Four

Performance and the Audience

Each passerby had a quick choice to make, one familiar to commuters in any urban area where the occasional street performer is part of the cityscape: Do you stop and listen? Do you hurry past with a blend of guilt and irritation, aware of your cupidity but annoyed by the unbidden demand on your time and your wallet? Do you throw in a buck, just to be polite? Does your decision change if he's really bad? What if he's really good? Do you have time for beauty? Shouldn't you? What's the moral mathematics of the moment? (Weingarten 2007:W10)¹

In the previous chapter the unique characteristics and unusual performance environment that the street provides was discussed. In this chapter how every aspect of the street performer's physical performance is designed, presented and manipulated to have the greatest impact on the potential audience within this street context, will be explored.

How a musical story is framed and rendered is of vital importance. I will discuss why and then how this is achieved, looking in more detail at the settings, costumes, decorations, face and body paints and instruments of a number of case studies. I will explore how these draw, hook, keep and impact on an audience. The performer's invitation, their visual and aural request for attention, how the intercommunication between performer and audience member shapes their interaction and a theoretical examination of the audience's response will then be discussed, as well as the audience's composition and the reverse impact on the performers themselves.

This chapter will highlight:

- The vital importance of framing, of 'love at first sight' and sound, especially in the street context, where the impact of this framing must be immediate.
- The unique locational difficulties the street performer must overcome and how these influence his choice of performance style and media.
- The role of the interflow of feedback between audience and performer.

¹ Gene Weingarten, 'Pearls before Breakfast', The Washington Post http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/04/04/AR2007040401721_pf.html (Accessed 27 August 2008).

- How the performer effectively utilizes all aspects of his environment to inspire his audience to value his output and to fill them with a sense of confidence and comfort.

Feeding off the spirit of the audience

‘We feed off the spirit of the audience.’ These are the words of Zola ‘Vicky’ Faku, the leader of The Impala Cultural Group, who will be introduced later in this chapter. His words capture the core of this study. Street performers operate in a challenging performance environment and they must tailor their performances to maximise their impact in this context. They must minimise its restrictions as far as possible and take full advantage of any situational benefits that might be available to them.

Richard Bauman describes ‘performance’ as: ‘A mode of communicative behaviour and a type of communicative event’ (Bauman 1992: 41). The immediacy, the fluidity and engagement, the level of communication that is required of a street performer in order to capture, keep and inspire his audience to value him, is far more intense than is needed in most other types of performance.

In this environment the physical representation of the performance event, and in particular how effectively this presentation *communicates*, is vital to the financial success of the street performer. If Vicki and his group are not effective in how they frame their performances, if they do not ensnare a passer-by, by visually or aurally hooking them for long enough to begin a meaningful dialogue or negotiation that could result in closing a financial deal, they won’t eat that night. The Impalas must quite literally feed off the good ‘spirit’ of their audience. On the street, the physical aspects of this varied and vital communicative and responsive art that the street performer must cultivate, and the audience’s response, are unique.

An introduction to framing—staging a performance without a stage

On 12 January 2007 Joshua Bell, possibly one of the world’s most famous and revered classical violinists, positioned himself along a wall in the L’Enfant Plaza station in downtown Washington DC, unpacked his Stradivarius violin, and began to play a six-piece, busking set.² There had been no warning of this unusual event, no

² Joshua Bell, Sony BMG, <http://www.joshuabell.com/biography> (Accessed 28 July 2008).

posters or fanfare that Joshua Bell would be performing. He was dressed casually in nondescript clothing and a peaked cap. Simply another street performer, trying to catch the stray change of the 1 097 commuters that walked passed him in the time it took to play his set.

In anticipation the editors of the *Washington Post*, who had persuaded Mr Bell to conduct this experiment, had discussed crowd control scenarios. They had been concerned that his playing might cause too large a group to stop and stare, that too many people would take photographs with their mobile phone cameras and distract him or that his fans might mob him and block the flow of commuters. What actually happened was completely unexpected... nothing.

Gene Weingarten, the *Washington Post* staff journalist who wrote up the event, describes the response to the exquisite playing of one of the most celebrated violinists alive today:³

Three minutes went by before *something* happened. Sixty-three people had already passed when, finally, there was a breakthrough of sorts. A middle-age man altered his gait for a split second, turning his head to notice that there seemed to be some guy playing music. Yes, the man kept walking, but it was something.

A half-minute later, Bell got his first donation. A woman threw in a buck and scooted off. It was not until six minutes into the performance that someone actually stood against a wall, and listened.

Things never got much better. In the three-quarters of an hour that Joshua Bell played, seven people stopped what they were doing to hang around and take in the performance, at least for a minute. Twenty-seven gave money, most of them on the run—for a total of \$32 and change.⁴ That leaves the 1,070 people who hurried by, oblivious, many only three feet away, few even turning to look (Weingarten 2007:W10).

Weingarten describes Joshua Bell's own response to the event as one of amused, slightly puzzled, embarrassment, and I notice that in the extensive biography featured on his official website, there is no mention of his failed performance at L'Enfant Plaza Station in Washington.⁵ The experiment, that began with a fun sense of playing a mild practical joke on the public ended, not with the anticipated thunderous applause, but in an awkward silence. 'Pearls before Breakfast' is the title

³Joshua Bell has won numerous accolades during the course of his long career. In 2007 he was awarded the Avery Fisher prize for being 'the best classical musician in America' (Weingarten 2007:W10).

⁴ On the 25 August 2008 the rand to America dollar exchange rate was R7.725 = \$1. Therefore Mr Bells takings of \$32 would translate to approximately R247. XRates.com <http://www.x-rates.com/d/ZAR/table.html> (Accessed 25 August 2008).

⁵Joshua Bell, Sony BMG, <http://www.joshuabell.com/biography> (Accessed 28 July 2008).

of the resultant article, featured in the *Washington Post on Sunday* (8 April 2007). This very loosely disguised play on the colloquialism ‘casting pearls before swine’, and the shocked tone of the article, clearly indicates the writer’s sense of almost disgusted disappointment.⁶

Including a discussion of this experiment and the ensuing article is done not because it makes a comment on the Washington train commuters, or because I wish to compare European or American or African audiences (one could definitely argue that different locations, in different cities, might bring about a very different set of responses), but because this event is a clear example of how dependent most of us are on external indicators when making evaluating judgements. I do not feel that this ignored performance casts any aspersions on Joshua Bell’s level of mastery, his musicianship or the value his skills have to the wider classical music listening audiences of the world. It does however say a great deal about the average man-on-the-streets’ lack of ability, without specialised knowledge, education, or associative framing, to place appropriate value on an event. Bauman describes what is commonly understood to constitute a performance, or ‘the most prominent performance contexts within a community’ (Bauman 1992:46), as including the following characteristics:

Performances

(...) tend to be *scheduled*, set up and prepared for in advance. In addition, they are *temporally bounded*, with a defined beginning and end; they are also *spatially bounded*, that is, enacted in a space that is symbolically marked off, temporarily or permanently, such as a theatre, festival ground, or a sacred grove. Within these boundaries of time and space, cultural performances are *programmed*, with a structured scenario or programme of activity (...) (Bauman 1992:46).

Only three days earlier Joshua Bell had played a more typical performance that included all the characteristics that Bauman lists. He performed to a full house at the Boston Symphony Hall, where the average ticket price was \$100. Like many internationally recognised classical musicians, he regularly plays to standing room only audiences and can charge many thousands of dollars for a single days work. But while performing at the station, he had none of the benefits of his usual associative framing. This might include: weeks of eager anticipation fuelled by a marketing campaign and posters, a regularly well-attended venue, a respected orchestra and a

⁶ Joshua Bell’s performance was videotaped and is available online. Josh Bell’s Full Performance, The Washington Post <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/video/2007/04/09/VI2007040900536.html> (Accessed 28 August 2008).

famous conductor to shake his hand when he walks onto a grandly lit stage. All of these associations tell an audience (one that perhaps even includes some of the very same commuters who would walk distractedly past him in an underground station) how to value him, how much to pay for his musical product, how much to enjoy his performance, and how much of their attention and respect he should be afforded.

In defining ‘frame’ Erving Goffman assumes:

(...) that definitions of a situation are built up in accordance with principles of organisation which govern(s) events – at least social ones – and our subjective involvement in them; frame is the word I use to refer to such of these basic elements as I am able to identify (Goffman 1974:10).

Charles Lemert, when writing about Goffman’s approach to reality, says that ‘(...) his was a sociology based on the premise that world reality was fragile, changing, uncertain, vulnerable, and always, always mediated’ (Lemert 1997: xxxvii). Goffman (1974:13), in discussing frame analysis, also claims that he is writing about ‘the organisation of experience’. Basing my own understanding on his writings, I will assume when discussing ‘framing’, that I am describing the perceived constructions; real, perceptual and normative, that individuals may use to structure their, or others, experience of a situation. The commuters walking through L’Enfant Plaza Station saw and heard ‘just another street musician’; their subjective construction of this experience did not include a famous, world-class performer, hence, for them, he just wasn’t there. Reality is fragile—ask any busker.

Communicatory forms in effective street performance

Street performers, as Joshua Bell and the *Washington Post* team of journalists discovered, have none of the benefits of positive framing. In fact, they often not only have to create positive framing for themselves, in a very limited time span, but also (as was discussed in chapter three) have to first overcome *negative* framing. Street performers, however good, are often seen as beggars, or as performers who are obviously not good enough to warrant a more formalised setting.⁷

⁷ The street performers at the Grahamstown Festival, like the Ubuntu Cultural Dancers, are an example of this. During the festival it seems that every street lamp in town is covered in posters advertising music and theatre events that are being held in the various official venues. In informal conversation with random audience members, I quickly realised that the street performers are often, mistakenly, viewed by the general public as those who are not good enough to be more formally (and expensively) staged.

In his book discussing various performative circumstances (mostly theatrical), Richard Schechner makes the bold statement: 'It takes a great audience to make a great performance' (1983: 38). In the psychological context inhabited by the street performer this is only conditionally true. As is clearly illustrated by Bell's subway performance, an effective street performance must truly embody Bauman's definition as, above all, an effective *communicative* event. One that communicates not just the material portrayed—which was the restriction placed upon Bell—but the associative framing necessary for that material, as well as the portrayer, to be appropriately valued.

Integral to the conception of performance as a frame that puts on display the intrinsic qualities of the act of communication itself is the way in which this framing is accomplished... Every act of communication includes a range of explicit or implicit framing messages that convey instructions on how to interpret the other messages being conveyed (Bauman 1992:45).

In the case of the street performer, initially it takes a *great performer* to generate a great audience: predominantly to attract and hook them, *despite* the difficulties of location and negative perception. But, as both the Ubuntu Cultural Dancers and Joshua Bell would no doubt tell you, that performer must first depict, in some manner, his value to his audience. He must position *himself* before he can expect the involvement of a great audience, an audience open to further communication and one that will generate the spirit needed to assist in giving a great performance. The creation of this interdependent relationship between performer and audience member is a crucial first step, but how does the street musician begin to build a positive relationship? Are there advantages to an absence of formalised framing? And if so, how are the disadvantages diminished and the advantages maximised? The following case study will be used to discuss the answers to these questions.

The invitation

The arrival of the Impala Cultural Group led by Zola 'Vicky' Faku (seven male group members - they carry a variety of instruments⁸ and props and all have various roles including singing, drumming, instrument playing and dancing during the performance), starting about half a block from Grahamstown central Church

⁸The instruments used by the Impala Cultural Group will be described later.

Square. The morning of 4 July 2007. The weather is clear and sunny, without being warm.

The first thing I hear is the rhythmic 'chink-ka-chink' of tin-can-top ankle bracelets.



The ankle bracelets of the Impala Cultural Group

Then the singing starts (no words yet) deep male voices, in two-part harmony, clearly cutting through the hum of the traffic and the noise of the thronging crowds. The Impalas are announcing their imminent arrival to the market place that has set up around the edges of most of the square. Half

obscured by the crowd, a group of seven young men carrying kudu horns and whips, are jogging very slowly along the thickly crowded pavement towards the clear central area of the square. They are in a tight formation, jogging at walking-pace; slowly enough for the crowd to easily part before them and be able to examine them as they go past. Rhythmically they raise their props above their heads in time to their singing, their collective ankle bracelets providing quite a loud rhythmic accompaniment.

Heads are turning. People are craning to see what is happening, what is coming. But they haven't started to form a crowd, an audience, yet. Throwing their voices, the group begins to sing a simple song that can now be heard throughout the square and I notice that even those who cannot yet see them have stopped to listen, waiting. Curious as to what is approaching. To those who can already see them, they are an eye-catching and arresting spectacle.

Heard but not seen – using the open soundscape to aurally frame and advertise

In his study of the *rwais*—Berber professional musicians (mostly street performers) originating from the *tashlhit*-speaking region of south-western Morocco (Schuyler 1984: 91)—Philip Schuyler describes a street performance on the Jama l-Fna, 'a large open square which lies between the Kutubia mosque and the main market area of Marrakech' (Schuyler 1984: 96). He explains that instead of just beginning their performance, the *rwais* first go through a ritualised tuning session. Tuning their instruments, and then playing a short improvisation to check the tuning,

has become an invitation to their potential *halqa* (circle of audience members),⁹ an announcement that the performance will soon commence.

To open the *halqa*, the *naqus*¹⁰ player (*bu naqus*) beats a rapid pulse as loudly as he can (...) The musicians take out their instruments and tune, and then check their tuning by playing an *astara*.¹¹ The backup musicians may hold a drone to support the leader's *astara*, but just as frequently each musician warms up by playing his own improvisation in a different part of the circle. These sounds of preparation may draw a crowd of one to two hundred spectators in a matter of minutes. When tuning is complete and a sufficient crowd has gathered, the *rwais* gravitate to the centre of the circle (...) (Schuyler 1984: 99).

I, too, have watched the *rwais* perform in Marrakech and have been 'called over' by this instrument tuning and warming up ritual to come and be part of a *halqa*. Particularly at night, one is drawn through the dark, following fragments of melody across the lively and chaotic Jama' l-Fna, towards the promise of a lamp-lit performance.

Both the performance preparation described by Schuyler and the Impala Groups' introductory aural entrance to the Grahamstown market place are effective illustrations of street performers utilising the fluidity of their environment to frame their performances advantageously. One often hears street performers before one sees them, their sounds are not curtailed by the walls of a venue, nor are they restricted by a rigid concept of performance duration or form. As has been established, a potential audience member may walk towards or away from a performance whenever they are inspired to do so.

The Impalas and *rwais*, by creating their own 'curtain raising', take control of both advertising and framing their performances. They begin performing before the performance starts, working the advantage of an open soundscape, and they frame their upcoming performance, both explicitly or implicitly, by allowing the potential audience an opportunity to 'see into the green room'.

This practice creates the option for the street musicians to use positive implication: they can hint at their virtuosity as musicians, they can imply that they are

⁹ 'Each group or individual performer tried to form a circle (*halqa*, pl., *halqi* from the Arabic word for circle or throat; in *tashlhit*: *lhalqt*) of spectators who will provide both a backdrop for the action and the money to make it all worthwhile' (Schuyler 1984: 96).

¹⁰ In the glossary that he provides at the end of his paper Schuyler describes a *Naqus* as 'Lit., bell; a piece of metal (usually a brake drum) beaten with metal rods, used to accompany *rwais* or village musicians (Schuyler 1984: 147).

¹¹ An *astara* is 'an instrumental prelude or interlude' that 'serves to warm up both musicians and audience'. Usually a 'single line form and melodic setting are repeated from beginning to end of the song' (Schuyler 1984: 94).

serious musicians, who take their instruments and the quality of their performance seriously. They can warm up with fragments of material from the upcoming performance and hence entice their audience with a ‘forthcoming attraction’. It gives a curious audience member a controlled framework within which to begin to form an opinion and an anticipation of the upcoming performance.

Another example of this technique in a different context is the classical Indian dance performance practice of *Mela prapti*. This is ‘the creation of the atmosphere of dance ensemble’ (Sambanoorthy 2001: 61). Before the performance begins the emotional atmosphere is hinted at and a sense of anticipation is built by ‘the *nattuvanār* playing special sequences of *jatis* on the cymbals behind the screen’ (2001: 61).

The invitation (continued)

The arrival of the Impala Cultural Group in the Grahamstown central Church Square. The morning of 4 July 2007.



The Impala Cultural Group—Vicky is dancing on the far right

Slowly jogging onto the church square, the procession of the Impala Cultural Group can now be seen. They are all dressed in white.

The whole Impala Cultural Group are wearing white cloths wrapped around their waists, each with intricate decoration sewn onto the hems, their bare torsos and necks are strung with long, swinging strings of black and white beads and ropes of strung seeds and they are carrying knobkerries,¹² animal tails, whips and kudu horns (isigodlo).¹³ One of them is wearing a white and black waistcoat and another is draped in a white shawl, everything starkly patterned: all white with occasional black outlines. Even the money-collecting bag, is white with black decoration. The only strong splashes of colour are pieces of black material with a red shield motive, that have been twisted into covering sections of some of their sarongs, and the bright yellow necklace worn by Vicky, demarcating their leader. Vicky also has a black cloth tied tightly around his head, creating a decorative 'tail' down his back. Their ankles are thickly laced with strings of tin-can-tops: they have cut the tops of cool drink cans and strung them in long strings, which are sewn onto bands of black felt, which are wrapped and tied around their ankles to create both a decoration and a percussive instrument.¹⁴



Dancing with a knobkerrie

Their entrance is very dramatic, both aurally (their singing, the occasional blast of the kudu horn and the rhythmic sound of their anklets as they jog into position) and visually. Choosing a large open space amongst the stalls, they quickly arrange their drums in a short line—providing an instant backdrop to the imminent performance. The moment the drums are put down, and the drummers have made themselves comfortable (some standing, some

sitting), it is as if a signal has been given, and the crowd begins to gather. Curious and absorbed, the onlookers stare, many transfixed. Some have followed the Impalas

¹² 'Knobkerrie', *Oxford English Dictionary*: 'A short stick with a knobbed head, used as a weapon or missile by South African Peoples.' <http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50127494>.

¹³ *isigodlo* 'the horn of an animal when severed from the head (used as a powder flask or trumpet) (...)' (Shaw and van Warmelo 1988: 835).

¹⁴ One member of the group has taken twists of thick plastic, filled them with small stones, blown them up and then sewn them around his ankles instead. The effect is a softer, shaker-like sound, as opposed to the harsher, more metallic clink of the tin-can-tops.

into the square, trailing behind them with curiosity. But they don't encircle the



Impalas too closely yet as they are still unsure of what they are about to see.

Love at first sight—visual framing

Joshua Bell chose to wear jeans, a long-sleeved T-shirt and a baseball cap for his performance. His clothing wasn't visually attention grabbing at all, in fact, in an attempt not to be recognised, he was trying to be as visually unobtrusive as possible. For the passers-by there was nothing to stare at, only something to listen to. In stark contrast the Impala Cultural Group go to great lengths to be as visually arresting as they can be. Their costumes are elaborate and there is careful attention to detail in how they clothe and adorn themselves. They wear eye-catching jewellery, they often paint their faces, they carry emotive, symbolic and decorative accessories such as whips and animal tails, and they co-ordinate their clothing so that their collective impact is enhanced and increased.¹⁵ They are actively engaged in sending an instant visual message, which they hope will increase the monetary value of their product. They tell me they have dressed themselves to be representative of their ethnic grouping; they tell me they are Mpondo.

Werner Enninger talks of clothing being a 'visually transmitted' 'signalling system' that usually 'remain(s) present throughout an interaction' (Enninger 1992: 219). He describes clothing as a powerful communicative tool, one that can indicate a great deal of information about the wearer. Perhaps if Joshua Bell had worn his usual, very formal and expensive, black concert clothes his Metro station audience would have taken a second glance. They may have drawn different conclusions about his playing. Street performers usually have very little with which to convey visual communications; they have only themselves, their attire and their instruments, and so clothing or costumes become of paramount importance.

Clothing can... be used to convey information about the wearer. On the one hand, such signals can give clues about the sender's social identity – sex, age, status, tribe, clan, gang, organization, profession, and the like – by illustrating adherence to the clothing norms that apply to such categories. On the other

¹⁵ Separate events performed by the Impala Cultural Group, involving different costumes, will be described in more detail later.

hand, by exploiting the full range of options, by modifying or even transgressing the established norms, the sender may seek to express particular individual characteristics. Clothing signals can also indicate to the receiver what behaviour in respect to the wearer should be (Enninger 1992: 222).

The impact of uniformity should also not be underestimated. Many of the groups that I encountered use the technique of a costume to their advantage. The African Dream Marimba band have a number of different types of dress, but usually they can be seen in matching tie-dyed T-shirts and dark pants. The dress of the Ubuntu Cultural Group has already been described; the girls are all in red dancing-skirts and the boys are all dressed in variations of Zulu-style costume. They make an eye-catching, synchronized statement. The Abonwabisi Brothers, discussed in chapter one, stand in a line, all dressed in identical shirts and dark pants. This makes their simultaneous movements as they dance seem even more uniform and dramatic, and adds immense impact to their performance.

Unity of colour, of texture and of form, creates a sense of confidence and these groups use this technique to heighten their impact and to evoke a feeling of ‘being established’. Uniformity looks like ‘conviction’, it looks like ‘surety’. The most spectacular and well-executed example of this technique, the costumes of the VukuZenzele woman’s singing group, is now described and discussed:

A story without words

Performed by VukuZenzele¹⁶ (a woman’s singing group - a choir of eight women on this occasion¹⁷) in the grounds of the V & A Waterfront in Cape Town in the afternoon of 22 September 2007. The weather was warm but overcast.

I follow the sound, intrigued, and walk round a corner and down a street to find its source. A swaying line of elderly women. The sound is strident, powerful and low, a guttural, vocal throbbing that spreads out from where they stand across the relatively quiet street. With mouths wide open and their painted faces impassive, they gently rock from side to side, lifting their feet and singing as if totally oblivious to their surroundings.

¹⁶ Wake up, Xhosa.

¹⁷ Their numbers vary and I have seen performances by VukuZenzele with as few as three women.



The VukuZenzele woman's singing group

The small audience that has gathered to stare at this wordless performance is silent and still. Positioned directly across from a double-storey building with a glass front and a large overhung entranceway, the VukuZenzele woman's group have created an acoustic catchment area by throwing their voices against the glass; anyone who attempts to walk past enters an arresting, humming zone of sound.

But even more attention grabbing than how they sound is what they look like. Together they form a riot of colour and detail. My eyes are drawn first to their painted faces. They might wear impervious expressions, but their skins glow with the dusty gold colour of their base paint, trails of white spots highlight their eyes and foreheads and their cheeks (and sometimes chins) are clown-like circles of white. There is only one woman wearing body paint – her arms and neck are covered in white. For headwear each has a black triangle-shaped turban made of folded cloth (iqhiya).¹⁸ These are draped with strings of beads, plaited ropes of ribbon, decoratively stitched with coloured thread, pinned with broaches and, mostly, wrapped again (perhaps to secure them) with a strip of bright red cloth. Somewhere, either with a beaded broach or a ribbon, each headdress shows the South African flag.

¹⁸ 'Iqhiya 1. A covering for the head; a large handkerchief used for this purpose (...) 2. A head-cloth, Hlu' (Shaw & van Warmelo 1988: 508).

Layer upon layer of necklaces are strung around their necks. First a wider necklet (umhlelo)¹⁹ forms an intricate 'collar' of beads on which the other longer, finer strings of beads lie. Necklaces of different lengths, different sized beads, strings of shells and seeds, crossed over the front of the torso and around the back, hanging straight down and looped repeatedly around the neck. These different styles of necklace are mixed together to form a thick front piece. The necklaces are mostly made of blue and white beads, some of them with beaded pendants (ijulukuqu) (Shaw and van Warmelo 1988: 532-533), which stand out starkly against the bright, burnt-orange colour of their long breast cloths. These fasten round under their armpits, and they are wearing brightly coloured T-shirts underneath (yellow, red, white and lime green).

While choice of layer order differs and each of these women has added unique touches to her costume, their basic clothing is alike. Starting with a long, black underskirt,

sewn with clusters of white buttons along the hem, the next layer is a blue apron, followed by a shorter orange overskirt. The aprons blue fabric²⁰ is patterned with repeated, white printed designs. Over this, striped with



black stitching and piping, is the slightly shorter orange overskirt. Decorative belts are looped around the back of their waists, mostly hung with fringes of beads. Ankles, wrists and ears are all also adorned with jewellery, mostly ropes of beads and shells and, in one instance, copper bangles.

The women of VukuZenzele each hold a (mostly beaded) sjambok in their right hands and a bag (itasi)²¹ made of the same orange material and also decorated with black stitching, in their left. Undeniably proud of their tribal heritage, visually

¹⁹ Umhlelo '2. wide collar of beadwork worn by women and girls, so called because it looks like intestinal fat' the first meaning cited for this word is '1. the inside fat' (Shaw & van Warmelo 1988: 652).

²⁰ This fabric is commonly called isiShweshwe.

²¹ This bag has a long strap and is slung over the shoulder, it is often used for smoking equipment (Shaw & van Warmelo 1988: 712).

splendid and almost haughty in their demeanour, these women are truly a spectacle to stop and stare at.

The women of VukuZenzele are Xhosa and are dressed in Xhosa traditional festival or dance dress, of a style typical for older women. Richly adorned with beads, ornaments, decorations and layers of brightly coloured fabric, each woman is a visual explosion of eye-catching colour. Xhosa traditional dress has been greatly impacted by urbanisation and modernisation. Writing in 1988, Shaw & van Warmelo (555) already say that: ‘No part of Cape Nguni material culture has shown as great a change as clothing has.’ Strictly, it is not correct for me to say that these women are wearing so-called ‘traditional dress’; this is because much of what I describe would originally have been made of plant and animal products (skin, bone, hair, shell and horns) and is now made of fabric, plastic or other modern materials (Shaw & van Warmelo 1988).



What is important to this discussion is that they have taken a great deal of trouble to dress in as authentic a way as they can. They say they are proud to wear these costumes, and it is enough for them that this form of dress and decoration easily identifies them as Xhosa women.²²

Though there is nowadays little difference in the types of garment worn by members of the different tribes, there are, as there always have been, considerable difference in form and style, not only between the groups, but within them for different regions and for different classes and conditions of person. Ornamentation, for example, differed not only from group to group, but according to the age and personal state of the individual (Shaw & van Warmelo 1988: 556)

The finer details of their costumes and the symbolic relevance of these details, for example the choice of the burnt orange or ‘reddish’ colour of the outer layers of their

²² It is not necessary for the purposes of this discussion to go into more detail about the traditional dress of different sub sections of Xhosa women—but it is important to note that there is a rich diversity in dress styles and norms in the different geographical groupings, which the design of a contemporary costume could be drawn from.

costume, is lost on the average passer-by, but the women of the VukuZenzele group don't seem to care much.

The colour of clothing throughout the Cape Nguni was black, brown or red (...) except in East Griqualand, where it was brown, and among the Vundla, where it was black. It would seem possible that red became predominant when red ochre, which is beaten into the fabric to give the colour, began to be imported by the European traders (Shaw & van Warmelo 1988: 557-558).

I include this reference to show how the choice of colour could potentially symbolise the region that the group is from, but that this significance would require specialised knowledge to deduce.

The balance between visual framing, musical content and audience configuration

Any type of mask, or in the case of the VukuZenzele group, their painted faces and costumes, evokes a reaction. When evaluating masks:²³

It is possible to relate such different manifestations by comparing and contrasting the type of transformation intended and its degree of distance from ordinary humanity (Tonkin 1992: 225).

The VukuZenzele women were the most highly decorated, carefully visually constructed case study I observed. They provided the least dramatic, emotionally engaging or accessible performance material, but the most carefully constructed visual spectacle, and this makes their interaction and relationship with their audience very intriguing and significant. Taking liberties with Elizabeth Tonkin's thought on masks and using it as a start for a more general discussion on visual framing: the VukuZenzele women intentionally 'transform' themselves. They proudly tell me, in more than one conversation, that they make all their own 'costumes',²⁴ and these costumes do indeed 'distance them from ordinary humanity' (Tonkin 1992), or rather, from the 'ordinary humanity' that they might encounter at the V&A Waterfront. Here their audience, particularly in the summer months, would predominantly be tourists and holidaymakers, often foreigners (as discussed in chapter two). To this audience

23 None of the street performers that I encountered were wearing masks, but many make use of face paint. I conjecture that this is because the interaction needed between themselves and their audience is too important and a vital aspect of that interaction is eye contact and visible expression. A mask would be a hindrance—it might have immediate impact, but would not remain engaging enough for a protracted period. Unlike mime artists who often use thick, or obscuring, face paint and only need the initial impact—their audiences don't hang around for long enough—street performers have more to offer. They potentially engage their audiences for a more sustained interaction.

24 It is interesting to note that the VukuZenzele women use the word 'costume' and not 'clothes' to describe their outfits.

these women would seem exotic and otherworldly, intriguing *because* of their ‘degree of distance’.

The Impala Cultural Group discussed above, also carefully put together their costumes in an attempt to be visually arresting, but their impact has a limit placed on it by their performance circumstances. They perform at various venues in the Eastern Cape region, to an audience that consists of a very different demographic to the potential audience at the V&A Waterfront. Their audience is not foreign, but local. The Impalas are wearing the traditional dress of the very same people who are watching them, so their style of dress is not at all alien or exotic to their audience. Unlike the VukuZenzele group, the Impala’s performances are *very* dramatic and musically engaging, and I can conclude that the street musician can balance the interplay between the varying impact of visual framing (based on their audience’s demographic profile and its expectations) and the need for musical narrative content (which is also determined by how successfully the audience is able to interpret what they are experiencing, i.e. which audience can be impacted by what.)

‘Unheard’ musical significance

At this point I would like to briefly examine the musical content of the VukuZenzele group’s performance. To the average, non-Xhosa audience member walking past them at the Waterfront, their sound (as described above) would seem to just be noise. Unlike some of the other groups I have seen who perform at the V&A Waterfront, VukuZenzele are not selling an audio CD alongside their collecting plate.

To those in the know, however, this is most definitely not just noise. These women are demonstrating a specialised vocal technique, a style of overtone singing that was undocumented anywhere in Africa until the 1980s. In 1980 David Dargie (1988: 29), in studying the music of the Lumko District, recorded a group of Xhosa girls, one of whom was singing chords:

This was a method of overtone singing called by the term *umngqokolo* (a term also used to cover other methods of singing). This is apparently the first example of overtone singing documented in Africa.

Dargie (1988: 56) describes this vocal technique:

The technique being used by this young girl was to produce unnaturally deep tones by singing in a forced manner in the back of the throat. These deep gruff tones are rich in overtones, and it was these patterns of overtones of

which I became aware. Later it became clear that singers using this technique are in fact following a pattern of melody, by using overtones. Since this discovery, evidence has come to light that not only is overtone singing used by other Thembu people, but it may be known widely among the people of Xhosa culture.

There are different forms and techniques of overtone singing used in different geographical regions (Dargie 1988: 56-57). For the performance described, the VukuZenzele group were using a 'gruff singing' technique where the performer 'produces tones well below the normal female register by using the forced voice well back in the throat', this sound is very rich in overtones and, using placement of lips and tongue and manipulation of the buccal cavity, certain higher overtones are highlighted (Dargie 1988:57).²⁵

Framing, reality and the audience

When VukuZenzele performed on 22 September 2007 there were no words, there was no discernable story in the music and there was seemingly little ebb and flow of emotional content, dynamics or energy in the performance. What, then, would catch and keep the 'spirit' of their audience of foreign tourists, largely ignorant of the significance of this overtone vocal tradition in Xhosa music? It appears that their visual framing is powerful and seemingly valuable enough to draw their audience.

The VukuZenzele group have been together for three years and they have been performing at the Waterfront for most of this time, so what they are doing is working financially. There are eight of them to split the takings, and the expense of their costumes and transport from Nyanga²⁶ to the V&A Waterfront would make it a necessity that their performances were lucrative enough for them to continue for this length of time.

I did not observe great enthusiasm from the small groups of people that gathered to take in the VukuZenzele group. They were staring and taking photographs rather than engaging, much as I have seen people stare at a painting in an art gallery: fixedly and with concentration and appreciation, but not with a *dynamic sense* of allowing themselves to be emotionally included. Perhaps the inaccessibility of their

²⁵ More important than evaluating the exact type of throat singing or VukuZenzele's proficiency levels, is that they are engaging in a specialised style of vocal performance that the majority of the audience they would encounter at the V & A Waterfront would be unable to recognise or appreciate.

²⁶ A township on the outskirts of Cape Town.

singing creates a sense of mystery? A kind of negative allure? This is a different type of audience engagement.

In this instance one might deduce that it is *their appearance that is the story*. VukuZenzele are not manipulating reality. The symbolic significance of their costumes, coupled with their unflinching adherence to their traditional vocal style *is* the message they wish to convey. As they themselves say, how much of this message the audience is able to decipher is irrelevant; the fact that the audience can deduce the basics, i.e. these are Xhosa women making traditional music—however that is perceived—is enough. The authenticity of their performance is authenticated for their audience by their appearance and location—as discussed in chapter two. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Bruner state that symbolism takes preference over actuality in tourist art (1992: 302), and VukuZenzele’s appearance and location are symbolic enough to validate them.

Referring again to Enninger (1992) and Tonkin (1992), I would suggest that the reason for VukuZenzele’s success lies in the fact that these women are *not* divorced from their *own* reality; they visually represent it and in doing so they are distanced from their audience’s concept of the ‘ordinary’. However, if we include Goffman’s definition of framing into this train of thought, we realise that VukuZenzele are also not divorced from the *reality* constructed by their audience’s ‘organisation of the experience’ (Goffman 1974:13). Unlike Joshua Bell’s, this audience, with its limited appreciation, sees VukuZenzele for exactly what they are, and I can’t help but wonder what impact the VukuZenzele Women’s Group would have if they were to perform at L’Enfant Plaza Station in Washington.

Setting the perfect stage

The staging of a performance by the African Dream Marimba Band, at the Whale Festival in the seaside town of Hermanus. Midday on 30 September 2007. The weather is hot and sunny.

The members of the African Dream Marimba Band are having a good time. Behind them the blue of the sea-and-sky backdrop match their colour-coordinated waistcoats and jeans. In front of them a large crowd has gathered on the grassy knoll to dance and clap along to the music. True professionals, their performances are always neat, rehearsed to the point of being cheerfully casual, their outfits are always matching and their marimbas well placed in the best locations. The men who are the

African Dream Marimba Band seem to have streamlined their operation to perfection, and today is no exception.

High up at the top of the Hermanus cliffs, near the busiest area of restaurants and the market, is an area of grass above the Hermanus Old Harbour. Behind it, the cliffs fall away to the sea and Walker Bay curves away into the distance, framed by a ring of white beaches. To the left and right the town of Hermanus continues, tucked between the mountains and the sea. During the annual Whale Festival this is a prime spot for watching the whales and their calves. Protected by the sheltered bay, these calves play and grow strong for a few weeks before heading out into the open sea. Next to a bank of indigenous flowers, at the corner of Market Street, is where the African Dream Marimba Band have chosen to set up.

I stand in the warm sunlight, waiting for them as they finish their final preparations before beginning to play yet another lively set, and I know that no



Members of the African Dream Marimba Band in Hermanus

greater stage could ever be set in even the grandest theatre house.

The African Dream Marimba Band is not from Hermanus; they have travelled here for the festival. It is a perfect day for them; the sun is shining, the town is full of local and foreign tourists who have come to see the whales and there is a relaxed

holiday atmosphere.

'And also you know when you travelling it's good, because um... you make lot of money, you meet different people, interesting people you know... new cultures, new environment and stuff like that.' I had interviewed Vincent Magobiyane a few days earlier in Cape Town, about two hours drive from Hermanus. Articulate and confident, Vincent comes across as a businessman.

'We are from Guguletu, we are born and bred here in Cape Town, all of us. But some people tend to think that we are from West Africa, I don't know why.' He laughs, *'Maybe it is because of our instruments.'*

Claiming space

With the positioning of these instruments, three marimbas and an *igubu*-style drum,²⁷ The African Dream Marimba Band have completed the first stage of effectively creating a ‘setting’ for their street performance, and with this act have achieved a number of things.

Firstly, as described above, they have positioned themselves so as to incorporate the landscape behind and around them into their act. By standing a little away from the buildings and off the sidewalk, on an elevated area, and by putting their backs to the most beautiful section of view from this bluff, they have made the Kleinriviers Berge function as their backdrop. Street performers do not have the framing advantages of a carefully designed set, backdrop and lighting. They must maximise the visual elements available in their environments to best showcase themselves and their performance. The Abonwabisi Brothers almost always perform beneath the same tree in the V & A Waterfront. Relatively small and with sprawling braches, this tree shields them from above and provides a visually framed space within which the Abonwabisi Brothers perform. It looks like a leafy curtain above and around them.

I have also previously seen the African Dream Marimba Band perform in the V & A Waterfront. On that occasion they chose to utilize the Old Clock Tower as part of their stage. This well-known landmark is a bright, attractive, circular tower, painted an eye-catching red and white. Positioned around its base, in the area of courtyard directly in front of this tower, the band had maximised the use of their surroundings to visually enhance themselves.

In Hermanus the African Dream Marimba Band have claimed a performance space; a physical area within which to stand, sit and move, and in which to keep and play their instruments. In some street environs there is competition for the best possible spaces. As has been previously discussed, the sound produced by street performers is not contained and, therefore, too close a proximity to other groups is unsuitable. The sounds of their music will overlap and render the performances uncomfortable, so, depending on how loud the music is, there has to be a suitably large distance between them. In cases such as the Impala Cultural Group and the

²⁷ ‘(...) a metal drum, cut down to an appropriate size, with a skin drawn over each open end and the skins laced to each other at their edges, has come into general use. (...) This is the modern *igubu* (...)’ (Shaw & van Warmelo 1988: 840).

Ubuntu Cultural Dancers, both performing at the Grahamstown festival and both competing with many other street performers, the informal rotation system described in chapter three solves the problem of overlapping—the best performance spots are shared out, each group getting an opportunity to use the space for the flexible duration of a set.

The African Dream Marimba Group have claimed the best possible performance location. It is next to a thoroughfare, close enough to be heard from the outdoor seating of the many nearby restaurants, but not to be intrusive. They are easily visible from quite a great distance due to the slight elevation of the grassy knoll they are standing on, right next to an already existing attraction (the edge of the cliff from which the whales are observed) and at the edge of a large enough area for their potential audience to stand, sit and listen or dance. There is a raised flowerbed behind them, which provides security for their belongings that are out of their line of sight as they perform, a shield from the light wind and a low ‘back of stage’.

Creating a stage

The group have demarcated this space by placing their instruments and props in such a way as to suggest to their audience where the ‘stage’ is and where the audience should position themselves. They achieve this by putting the lead soprano marimba in the centre with the two remaining marimbas slightly behind it on either side, creating an arc. Directly behind the lead marimba is the drum upon which one of the group sits and performs, as well as playing different hand-held percussion instruments. This arrangement is very effective and gives a sense of orderliness. The audience is left in no doubt where they should stand in order to be able to view the performance and all the performers easily. They are also in an acoustic ‘sweet spot’ and will hear the full aural impact of the different instruments. This slight arc also creates a sense of comfort and security—a sense of being ‘embraced’ by the sound.

Other performers that I have observed achieve this effect in different ways. Goodman sits on a box, solidifying his claim to his corner of the pavement by providing his own furniture. Sitting is also a more stable visual position than standing. The Ubuntu Cultural Dancers provide their own ‘back of stage’ by placing a small table behind them; they are also using a piece of furniture to give the impression of solidity. This table is used to sit on while playing a performance, to protect belongings

and instruments beneath and is sometimes moved forward to be a prop within the performance.

The front or the edge of the performing area is just as important and again most of the performers I observed used techniques of physical demarcation to make their audience feel at ease. In a definition of ‘performance’ in his chapter titled ‘Theatrical Frame’, Goffman (1974:124-125) states:

A line is ordinarily maintained between a staging area where the performance proper occurs and an audience region where the watchers are located. The central understanding is that the audience has neither the right nor the obligation to participate directly in the dramatic action occurring on the stage, although it may express appreciation throughout (...)

Often the collecting plate or box is used to show where the end of the performance space needed is. This creates an invisible line across which audience members are unwilling to step. Forms of audience interaction like clapping, singing along, or calling out responses are usually more comfortably done from behind this line, inside the safety of the ‘audience zone’. Most would have witnessed the discomfort of an audience member suddenly singled out to actively take part in a performance for which he or she isn’t prepared—the victims of mime artists, for example.

The VukuZenzele group use a bright orange jersey, spread flat on the ground with a white polystyrene plate on top as a collection receptacle for money. This is large and eye-catching, it clears the space before them and stops passers-by from interrupting their performance by walking between them and the audience members who have gathered a little further back to watch.

Goodman’s collection tin is on a short chain fastened to the box that he sits on. Goodman being blind, this is a necessary precaution against theft. On the back of his guitar he has a cardboard sign (described in chapter one) that draws one closer to read it, but the positioning of his collection tin (described in chapter three) also indicates a small circumference inside which one does not want to intrude.

After watching a number of performances by the Impala Cultural Group, who do not put down a collection box or plate, but rather use a bag that is carried by one of their members, I realised that their audience members will not gather too closely until they are sure how large the performance area is. It seemed to me during the performances that I observed that the audience would hang back, preferring to err on the side of caution until they were sure where the edge of the stage was before they

could relax, step forward up to the 'line' Goffman refers to and enjoy the performance.

The African Dream Marimba Band have set up a tall, bright yellow drum on top of which their self-produced audio CDs are stacked and displayed for sale. This raises the CDs for easy inspection. Next to this drum sits an empty ice-cream bucket as a collection box. The band don't mind if their audience get close to them and so the



A member of the African Dream band and an interactive audience member

drum and collection bucket are situated right in front of the lead marimba, allowing audience members, particularly children, to get right up to where they are playing.

Children are often the first to be intrigued and engaged by street musicians. On numerous occasions I witnessed young children first running towards a performance to be a passive or active spectator (dancing, clapping and singing), and then—intrigued by the immediacy and the interactive nature of a street performance—running back to their parents to collect money to place into the collection

plate.

Instruments – managing the balance between sound and functionality

According to Andrew Tracey (2005: 243) the Venda *mbila mutondo* was the only 'traditional xylophone in South Africa'²⁸. It is no longer played. West Africa is better known for its various xylophones—hence those tourists who think that the African Dream Marimba Band are from there. The band members may be from Cape Town, but the design of their instruments is not. Tracey goes on to say that: 'The modern Afro-marimba from Zimbabwe has become popular since 1980, especially among Xhosa speakers. It is played in groups, with instruments of four different sizes' (Tracey 2005: 243).

Vincent tells me that their marimbas are made by a Zimbabwean instrument maker, who lives near them in the township of Guguletu. They use only three

²⁸ '(...) A large instrument with carved wooden keys and gourd resonators underneath, played with rubber tipped sticks. Unfortunately it is no longer played' (Tracey 2005:243).

differently sized marimbas and their instruments are lightly constructed for ease of handling and travelling. They play a variety of percussion instruments including a large *igubu*-style drum, which is stood on its metal frame, and on which the percussionist sits and plays with a rubber-headed mallet. Unlike the *jembe* described in chapter three, this large, *igubu*-style drum has skins laced on both ends. Other light percussion is shared out amongst the group: a big cowbell is propped against one of the legs of the lead marimba, two small plastic shakers are placed at the percussionist's feet, along with a tambourine, ready to be picked up easily and quickly by any of the performers. The two mallets held in each of the three marimba player's hands are also used as percussion instruments by knocking them together.

For the street performer instrumentation is a constant balancing act between how loudly an instrument can play, at what level of quality and how appealing the sound that can be produced is, how functional the instrument is in terms of ease of movement and transportation, how breakable it is, and how quickly it can be set up and dismantled. Each group chooses, and then sometimes modifies, its instruments to optimise their impact within the restrictions placed upon them by their performance environment.

The lightest and easiest instrument to transport is the human voice. Tracey describes it as: 'the greatest musical instrument in Africa' and goes on to say that 'this is especially true in South Africa, which has a strong choral tradition' (Tracey 2005: 238). Carol Muller agrees with Tracey's position on the importance of the voice in South African music:

Africa is also known for its fondness for the human voice, singing alone and collectively, in simple call and response and in more complex forms of vocal polyphony. In South Africa, it is certainly the human voice that is the original and most frequently used musical instrument. (Muller 2004: xix)

The Abonwabisi Brothers and the VukuZenzele Group, performing only with their voices and not using any other instrumentation at all—including percussion—are fairly flexible. They can easily walk between different locations, their only difficulty being that in order to generate enough volume and impact using only voices the number of group members is higher. In both these cases quite a large group of people (between eight and 12) has to be transported to and from each performance and rehearsal location.

Goodman and Andrew Peters,²⁹ also predominantly vocal artists, are in an easier position as soloists. Travelling only with their fairly light guitars, they are completely independent.

So what do the street performers who have become skilled at playing larger, bulkier instruments do? They still have to be able to move quickly and easily. Their instruments still need to be easy to handle and yet have enough volume and resonance. Their choices depend largely on how mobile the group is and how often and how far they move to reach their next performance location.

The Impala Cultural Group, who are a very mobile group moving quickly between different locations, solve this problem by using mid-size instead of full-size *jembe*. These midsize or even smaller *jembes* are widely used by street performers³⁰ and are often accompanied by the double-headed, barrel-shaped drums described above called *igubu*. The Impala Cultural Group perform using three *jembe*. These are just large enough to create intense volume and yet light enough to swing over a shoulder as they jog away to the next session. At the next location two of the drums are usually placed on the ground and sat on, and one is played standing up, but this varies during the performance. Shoulder straps are attached to the drums so they can be played standing up.

They supplement their rhythm section with any percussion that is light and easy to carry as well as by using their own bodies to create sounds. Their anklets that have been described above, are very effective percussion instruments, which they automatically carry with them. The *isigodlo* (kudu horn) creates a strong and piercing sound, and doubles as a beautiful prop when it is not being played. They clap their hands and click their fingers and together with their voices this all creates an evocative and engaging sound.

After watching a street performer struggling to play the clarinet in the snow in Munich, Germany (Winter 2007) I was struck how well the street musicians I have encountered during the course of this study balance, manage and maximise the use of their instruments.

²⁹ Andrew Peters will be introduced in chapter five.

³⁰ One of the percussionists I interviewed invited me to go shopping for a new *jembe* for himself in Greenmarket Square in Cape Town. Talking with the stall owner who sold him his new instrument I was told that the owner had observed a growing market for *jembe* in a wide range of different sizes, particularly smaller instruments.

The performance

Dramatic elements of a performance by the Impala Cultural Group led by Zola 'Vicky' Faku. Grahamstown central Church Square. The morning of 4 July 2007. The weather is clear and sunny, without being warm.

Vicky, demarcated by his bright yellow necklace, is the leader of the Impala Cultural Group. He is tall and very strong looking, like an athlete, and his expression is haughty. There is an air of defiance and rebelliousness about him. He challenges his audience to listen, he challenges them to stare and follow him through his musical story and he challenges them not to walk away. It seems as if it is not a request but a command, and they obey him.

I am part of the crowd, taking photographs. Crouching, moving around, changing my position to get different angles, and different members of the group. I am listening, but only with half an ear, my digital recording device is hanging around my neck, functioning as my 'ear' for now. I know that they will perform again and again throughout the festival and that I will be able to find and listen to them again. For now I am focussed on capturing their manipulation of, and impact on, this audience.

I pick a spot and crouch next to a child in the front row of the crowd. Vicky notices my camera, and glares at me defiantly; am I patronising them? Am I treating them as a curiosity? Or are my photographs a compliment to their splendid performance? Then he notices that some of his audience are also curious about the camera, perhaps they are impressed that his group warrants such close attention? His demeanour instantly changes.

The audience is riveted. No one can tear their eyes away from the Impala Cultural Group's mix of song, dance and story. Vicky has them in the palm of his hand; with a gesture he can make them laugh, with a sweeping look they will sink into silence, with a stamp they will flinch and then laugh self-consciously at themselves. Children and adults alike follow his instructions. The Impalas begin to build their story and their drumming picks up tempo. Their dance movements become more frenetic, more energised, and their singing louder and more insistent. The percussion is now a pulsating rhythm and, despite the cold, the group is dripping with sweat. Then, suddenly, at the stroke of a drum, the performance ends and Vicky slams onto his knees right in front of my camera, his sweating face inches from the lens. Without a word he stands up and stalks away. A dramatic exit. His band of brothers following, singing, as they melt into the dispersing crowd.

Holding onto the threads of attention

Once captured, it is essential to hold onto the audience's attention until they have had a chance to evaluate the street musician's performance, and decide that it has delivered a sufficiently valuable enough experience to pay for. This can be done in a variety of ways, but including arresting, dramatic elements is the most common. As has been previously described, Joshua Bell relied totally on the *content* of his musical performance; there was nothing added to the body of his performance that would provide a hook, a point of interest *other* than the music itself. The Impala Cultural Group approach the content of their street performances very differently. Although, as shall be discussed in the following chapter, the musical and narrative elements of their performances are central and, quite apart from their very effective visual and aural introductory framing, the Impalas still utilise every dramatic trick that they can devise to keep their audience present, engaged and entertained by their material.

Goffman describes how in more traditional performance settings (in this case a theatrical one) the audience's ability to communicate with performers during their performance is restricted, that communication becomes directional rather than cyclical:

Unlike the characters on the stage, onlookers can only respond through the back channel, disattendably expressing in a modulated way that they have been stirred by what is being unfolded before them (...) It is not the shout of responsive action that talk³¹ mostly needs and seeks to get, but murmurings – the clucks and tsks and aspirated breaths, the goshes and gollies and wows – which testify that the listener has been stirred, stirred by what is being replayed for him (Goffman 1974: 541).

Vicky does not see his group, or the audience, as being restricted by this limited conception of the audience's potential engagement and participation. The previously discussed fluidity and lack of containment that characterise this performance environment can be used as a positive benefit and the Impala Cultural Group use this inclusive form of dramatisation to great effect.

The street musician is at liberty to literally reach out and hold onto his audience if he so desires. The Impalas act with large gestures and animated facial expressions, they mock-stampede their audience, they joke and flirt and tease. One of them will drop down on his knees before an unsuspecting audience member, holding

³¹ Goffman has been discussing 'face-to-face informal talk' just prior to the section I have cited here.

up the collection bag with a beseeching expression on his face and make the audience laugh at his brazen audacity. This group have become masters at including dramatic elements into their musical performance that provoke, inspire and hold attention.

The inclusion of dance is another component used by many of the larger groups included in this study. Adrienne Kaeppler defines ‘dance’ as:

A complex form of communication that combines the visual, kinaesthetic, and aesthetic aspects of human movement with (usually) the aural dimension of musical sounds and sometimes poetry (Kaeppler 1992: 196).

The Abonwabisi Brothers use dance movements in exactly this way. Their actions illustrate and *communicate* their songs—the particular style of dance they use, and its choreography, will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter. The Abonwabisi Brothers sing using call-and-response, which Muller describes: ‘In this musical form, the call is generally articulated by a soloist and the response comes from a group, but the phrases of the musical dialogue overlap, so that the leader’s line continues as the group responds, and their line continues as the leader re-enters’ (Muller 2004: xxv). Their dance movements highlight and emphasise their storytelling, with the synchronicity of their movements making them all the more engaging. Even to those who do not understand the language they are singing in, the dance movements create interest.

The girls from the Ubuntu Cultural Dancers also sing and dance simultaneously, using high kicks and jumps to add excitement. Muller (2004: xxv) describes the body as ‘central to all performance’. She is writing more generally about dance inclusion in traditional forms of music across South Africa, but her description is very apt to the above-mentioned street performances:

The rhythm of the body expressed in individual and communal dance is integral to powerful musical performances in many parts of Africa. Typically the rhythms produced by instrumental performers exist in tension with the rhythms of the dancers in the same musical performance (Muller 2004: xxv).

Value

Everything that has been described in this chapter, all of the elements of a street performance, are created and executed to gather the interest, confidence and favourable opinion of an audience. In the successful performances, every benefit available is used to improve the street performer’s frame. Performers utilise each possible positive aspect of themselves and their performances, their instrumentation

and their environment. This is mostly to make money. Vicky told me that he and his Impala Cultural Group 'feed off the spirit of the audience'. But the word 'spirit' can have many meanings. The street performer is not just a businessman; if he was he might bring something else to the street to sell. He is different from the vendors in the marketplace that he performs alongside because he must also be an artist, and this causes him to 'feed off the spirit of his audience' in more ways than one. Street performers literally 'feed' off the goodwill of those who throw money into their collection plates, but they are also inspired by the 'spirit' and strength of those they see around them in their communities and they also 'feed' off the energy, participation and enjoyment of those who watch them.

Chapter Five

Storytelling

In this chapter I bring together all the different areas explored previously. Four storytelling events will be used to illustrate the theoretical discussions raised. Starting with a brief look at the importance of oral storytelling in Africa, and at sung musical narrative in particular, I move to define and examine the concept of a story for the purposes of this discussion, reiterating and developing the discussion starting point put forward in chapter one.

The concept of a ‘storyfield’ is introduced and developed. Building on this, a representative model is outlined that includes all the different types of story presented in the case studies. This model, applied to a case study, is used to depict and clarify how the complex and interdependent *types* of story explored in previous chapters—as well as their interaction with the performance environment (including the macro-structure)—influence and interlink with each other. This provides an *illustrative overview* of all of the intertwining stories and aspects, which allows for logical and comprehensive conclusions to be drawn in chapter six.

This chapter highlights:

- The importance of the street performer’s physical, societal, historical and personal context in defining his or her musical storytelling output.
- The sensitivity and interdependence of the flow of communication between the street performer and his audience.
- The overlapping complexity of the different story types present in a single performance event.
- The importance and impact of the street performer’s flexibility in a fluid performance environment.

Oral storytelling in Africa

Much of the preservation of Africa's historical, traditional and cultural inheritance has been entrusted to those who can voice it aloud.¹ Those who can tell it, sing it, intone it, perform it, chant it, enact it and make a spectacle of it. The act of storytelling, in all its forms, holds a vital position in establishing the very identity of those who live on the African continent. The importance of the voice, of voiced traditions and arts, and the dissemination and preservation of Africa's narratives orally, cannot be underestimated.

There is certainly no doubt of the importance of the subject for the study of Africa. For Africa is celebrated above all for the treasure of her voiced and auditory arts, and as the home of oral literature, orature and orality, and the genesis and inspiration of the voiced traditions of the great diaspora (Finnegan 2007:1).

Vuyani's story of the girl who wouldn't be respectful

Told to me by Vuyani Mtwazi, leader of the Ubuntu Cultural Dancers. Sitting near Grahamstown central Church Square, under a gum tree, around noon on 4 July 2007.

'When people get married they have expectations.' Vuyani shrugs, he is about to tell me a story with a sad ending. He is working on stories with sad endings. We are taking a break from the heat of the midday sun, resting in the shade of a sprawling gum tree that has littered brittle, sickle-shaped gum tree leaves all around the Ubuntu Cultural Dancers' props table.²

In his own very thoughtful, softly-spoken way Vuyani is a crusader as well as a composer, storyteller and businessman. He believes that he should be trying to make a difference in the world. He believes that his creativity (collectively as a storyteller, arranger and choreographer) is a calling and that it should be used to express, uplift, influence, preserve and save stories, and even people in his community. The dancers and musicians in Vuyani's group are mostly children who

¹ For the purposes of this study we will not be exploring the written word. However, I would like to mention that although it has been previously thought that there has not been a widespread or significant written tradition across sub-Saharan Africa and although the oral tradition is undoubtedly stronger and richer in this region, Finnegan points out that 'It is true that, contrary to some preconceptions, writing too is an established medium for doing things with words in Africa...' (Finnegan 2007: 2). She includes a list of relevant studies, which can be found in the footnote of the same page. As a collected body, the written output of sub-Saharan Africa, both foreign and African-language, may have significantly less width and depth than other regions of the world, but we should neither ignore nor belittle its importance.

² This table has been mentioned in chapter four.

have been rescued from 'the inevitable township fate of teenage pregnancy, drug addiction, and violence'.

Being afflicted with 'township mind' is what he calls the destructive state of mind that this collection of dangers causes in the youth who live in townships, and it is this unproductive headspace that he and his partner are actively trying to combat. Giving these teenagers the opportunity to sing and dance is one way to keep them occupied and, hopefully, engaged in something constructive and expressive. The youngest in the group is 12 years old, the oldest 19. Some of them used to be drug addicts and are now encouraged to be 'drug marshals' in their communities. Vuyani feels it his duty to engage with controversial and relevant issues that he believes people are dealing with, in his dance and music storytelling creations.

'They have expectations' he continues with his story about getting married, 'and they want the other person to fulfil certain roles. This is going to be a Xhosa song³ about getting married.' He has already told me in detail how carefully he choreographs each dance, how each story is an expression of a 'mood' and how vital it is that each dancer and musician is 'in the mood' when they perform it.

'Do you know about lobolo?'⁴ He asks, looking at me earnestly. 'Because it is important you understand the issue for you to understand this story; because when a man pays lobolo he expects to have a respectful wife!'

I do know about lobolo. Vuyani has purposely chosen a very contentious issue to base his story around; an issue that would have relevance to many people in his audience⁵ and would often elicit a strong response. Vuyani explains to me that a lobolo is the bride payment that a man must make to the family of the woman he would like to marry, before he is permitted to take her as his wife. In many cases it takes the form of herd of cattle and the negotiations around the size, delivery and constitution of this payment can be very lengthy and complicated. To many, Vuyani tells me, lobolo symbolises a clash between rural and urban, traditional and modern,

³ The Ubuntu Cultural Dancers try to be culturally non-specific. Vuyani tells me they perform in what they perceive to be Xhosa, Zulu and Tswana styles of storytelling, drawing on traditions, styles of dance and inspiration from each ethnic group.

⁴ 'Lobolo' is defined in the *Zulu-English Dictionary* as: 'A consideration involving the right over children, goods, cattle or money handed over by the bridegroom's people to the father or guardian of the bride in order to ensure right to any issue of the marriage' (Doke et al 1958: 461).

'Lobola' *Oxford English Dictionary* 'Also loboler, lobolo. The South African native custom of marriage by purchase. Also the price or present given for a bride according to this custom.' <http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/display/50134690?keytype=ref&ijkey=8gm2iRjeAXMjg>.

⁵ The Ubuntu Cultural Dancers often perform for a local audience. Unlike the street performers who perform at the V&A Waterfront, they have limited access to foreign tourists.

and in informal interviews I engaged in during the course of this study, opinions and standpoints varied tremendously.

In a private conversation a percussionist I interviewed⁶ told me that his girlfriend has had three children with him in the time that they have been trying to save for her lobolo. Her family does not approve the match, and in an attempt to discourage the marriage, they have set the lobolo so high that they know he will be unable to pay it without saving for years.⁷

Some of the questions raised in conversations I have had surrounding this issue are: Why should a couple wait to get married until the man can afford to pay for what amounts to a very expensive gift to his future in-laws? Why, as many young women are no longer living and working with their families in rural areas, should the family be compensated for losing her labour? Why, as many lobolo negotiations are no longer regulated by tribal customs, should young men be held to ransom by the demands of their future in-laws? Is lobolo indirectly discouraging matrimony, and therefore partly responsible for the high HIV/Aids infection rates across South Africa? Is it an outdated tradition, causing harm, incompatible with modern South African society, or a valuable, traditional practice that brings families closer together?

Vuyani continues. 'A young girl who gets married is called a makoti and she must respect her new in-laws. My story will be about a girl who gets married. Her lobolo has been very high. Her husband will have paid a great deal of money.' He glances at me to see if I respond. 'And then he will take her home to live with his family. He has an old father and she must care for her father-in-law. But this young girl will have no respect for her father-in-law. She will have no respect for the tribal laws, she will be a city girl and she fights with him. While her husband is away she will not obey her father-in-law and one day she gets so frustrated that she hits him!' Vuyani pauses and looks at me again, shaking his head, expecting me to express shock. 'And so she is chased away from the tribe and cannot come back.' He finishes abruptly. 'See, it is a story with a sad ending.'

⁶ Who would not wish to be named.

⁷ He told me that in some cases the *lobolo* goes up with each successive child that the couple have together before they are married, and that if the bride cannot bare children after the marriage, there have been many cases of the groom demanding the *lobolo* back.

Singing it!

I think that Vuyani would have agreed with music teacher Frieda Bokwe Matthews's publicly stated belief. In a lecture in London in 1935, after spending a large part of her life in exile, she said: 'You can never utterly destroy the hopes of a people who can sing (...)' (Bokwe Matthews 2005: 40).

All across Africa stories are handed along through the medium of sung storytelling. News is spread, histories are remembered, futures foretold, laments expressed, warnings given, cultural practices taught, group unity reiterated, problems voiced and skills passed down, all through a combination of words (text and lyrics), music and storytelling performance. Together these constitute enacting a sung storytelling event.

Ruth Stone describes the Mende people of Sierra Leone who perform *domeisia* (narrative songs) for entertainment and the griots who have praised, criticised and spread news and messages for powerful patrons since the early 13th century (Stone 1995:257). The Yoruba of Nigeria, already cited in chapter one, enact participatory sung folktales called *álò* (Kubik 1989: 134). During the apartheid years in South Africa political prisoners sang the stories of their heroes to keep up their courage (Mandela 1994). These are just a few, but there are countless examples of sung stories that are reflective of the lives they are integrated within, and to apply Stone's comments about African music to sung storytelling events is appropriate:

In all of these settings music is integrated into life, and although the diversity throughout Africa is apparent, some common elements penetrate the myriad of details. African performance stands apart from that in the West because it is clearly part of the fabric of life (Stone 257-258: 1995).

Holistic perspective of the street performer's sung narrative

Rather than just 'tussling with the interaction of "text" and "performance" – a recurrent theme (in oral storytelling traditions) over recent decades' (Finnegan 2007:189) I would like to keep the concept of a musical narrative as unified, and subsequently, as complex, as possible. Tempting as it would be to break apart each musical narrative into its individual components (words/text/lyrics, music and performance) and discuss and evaluate them separately, the very fluidity and the ephemeral nature of the street performer's musical narrative is too interwoven within itself and its environment to pull apart. It corrodes and morphs anew too quickly into

something different, and so in order for the interpretation to be comprehensive, the ethnography must be as all-inclusive and multi-layered in its approach as possible.

As has been established in previous chapters the street performer's 'musical narrative' is too fragile in its inter-environmental dependency to strip its text of the performance context. It would render it dead—like looking at just the bones of an animal that one could be examining alive and moving. As Ruth Finnegan (2007: 196) explains '...the linguistic paradigm sometimes used to underpin performance studies can obscure the complexities of multimodal realisation'.

She continues to explain that this approach is in line with a strong movement in current thinking:

These recent perspectives lead into more subtle attempts to grasp the overlapping dimensions of entextualised performance, performed textuality – and with them the complex ways people draw on diverse modes to actualise the past in the present, external and internal, uniqueness and recurrence, the ephemeral and the durable, as they creatively enact and interweave words (and perhaps more than words). The multi-layered quality of performed textualisations and their intertwinedness with *both* the durability of something (more, or less) *and* the evanescent moment of performance and participation adds yet further complexity to the once simple sounding notion of oral text (Finnegan 2007: 196).

So, despite a strong awareness of the linguistic elements of storytelling, each musical narrative event will be approached as holistically as possible, including as many non-verbal dimensions as can be represented. That is not to say that this chapter will move away from lyrics and use of language within the performance matrix, but will ascribe the appropriate weight to their importance and will rather attempt to set up the conceptualisation of the storytelling event in such a way as to be able to draw a more holistic set of conclusions.

A song about coming home

Performed by the Abonwabisi Brothers (isicathamiya choir of 12 voices) at their usual location, under the tree next to the Victoria and Albert Hotel Complex in the V& A Waterfront, in the late afternoon on 8 February 2008. The weather was warm and mild with a light breeze.

'They are singing about township life'; the man standing next to me doesn't look away from the performers as he talks softly to me. The keening, high-pitched melody of the lead singer of the Abonwabisi Brothers cuts through the summertime bustle of the Waterfront around us. The line of singing brothers behind him simply,

rhythmically and repetitively chanting: 'Mama, mama' as they sway lightly from side to side, their feet lifting up off the ground for emphasis, rather than stepping down towards it. This style of choreography and Zulu singing is called isicathamiya, which roughly translated means 'stalking style' (Erlmann 2005:231). '(In) isicathamiya (...) emotional expressiveness and the sensory experience of being a body passes through notions of lightness and detachment from the earth' (Erlmann 2005: 234). I am holding a recording device in my hand and it clearly picks up both the impromptu translation and commentary from the man beside me, and the song being performed.

'He is singing for his mother', my companion quietly continues, switching fluidly between direct translation and his own comments. 'You'll never see me going out late to other houses... he is promising the mother that he is not going to be going around other houses in the evening late.' For the first time since the song began he glances at me, shaking his head. 'In the townships the young ones get back late – where are they sometimes? He is giving the certain time that he is going to be at home.'

The song continues, the lead singer becoming more animated, more expressive and intent in his delivery, his arms reaching upwards beseechingly. The tight harmony used to emphasise the end of his phrases is sung by the higher voices behind him on the left of the line of supporting singers. The remaining line mournfully shuffles and chants beneath. My companion is clearly affected, his hands in his pockets, he stands very still while he watches, his expression serious.

'These young ones today, they become naughty, you know. So now you say probably something happened... maybe you never see them again... going around. And now the world is so... it's not good any more to be going up and down during the evening, according to the situation and things that are happening around.'

The song ends and the man beside me sighs and walks over to place a coin in the Abonwabisi Brother's collection box.

Storyfields

Like magnetic fields or force fields in physics, musical stories create a surrounding field of impact. For clarity, and because metaphorically they share many of the same characteristics with the scientific understanding of a 'field', I will take the liberty of coining a term, 'storyfields'. The *Oxford Concise Science Dictionary*

(Isaacs et al 1991:263) defines a 'field' as: 'a region in which a body experiences a force as the result of the presence of some other body or bodies. A field is thus a method of representing the way in which bodies are able to influence each other.'

Why 'fields' and not 'levels', or another metaphor? It is perfectly feasible to metaphorically conceptualise the different types of story as being represented on different 'levels'. However for the remainder of this chapter I would like to gradually build a representation of the musical storytelling event that is as close to a physical representation of the actual performance as possible. If we were to remain bound by the concept of 'levels' we would have to work around the implication that one level of story is more or less important than another (i.e. a higher or lower level), and we would also be restricted by the fact that using the metaphor of 'levels' does not allow for the concept of 'overlapping'. As this study developed I realised that a simple diagram would help to demonstrate the complexity and interaction between the different forms of story inherent in any single performance. This diagram will now be introduced.

Models and reality

The magic moment of performance is indeed one escapable quality of storytelling (Finnegan 2007:57).

I have left this 'magic moment' as intact as possible. Building and expanding on the metaphorical starting point of interwoven storyfields, the physical construction of the actual performance will walk through the complexities of the reality of the musical storytelling event (please see diagram below), hopefully deconstructing it as little as possible into its components, and keeping the discussion centred in the ethnography of the event. This is an exercise in clarity to allow the complete interlocking system to be easily perceived.

Gerard Béhague asked that performance be approached even more holistically than it had been previously. He criticised the more traditional, formalised approach that cut the performer and the music he or she produces out of their performance context, and examines them separately.

The emphasis on sound-structure phenomena and the search for historical authenticity of sound production have (thus) limited the desirable broader conceptualisation of performance. An all-inclusive approach to the study of performance must consider the various contextual factors affecting the performance, the actual musical and extramusical behaviour of participants

(performer and audience), and the rules or codes of performance defined by the community for a specific context or occasion. As an organising principle musical performance ends up being viewed as an event and a process fully integrated into the field of musical action as nonverbal communication (Béhague 1992:174).

I do not wish to divert into an extended discussion of the merits or justifications of various representative models, but rather intend that Béhague's approach provide a theoretical *guideline* from which to better examine the complexity of the experienced musical narrative event. Like a chalk sketch on the stage—irrelevant once the performers have taken their positions, but a utilitarian guide to assist them up until that point.

Storyfields expanded

We can constructively take the metaphor of a field further by realising that storyfields can be directly equated to gravitational or magnetic fields in physics, in that they are fields that have a variable effect, one that diminishes the further from the source you go. This occurs both physically (the frequency waves of sound can only travel so far at a certain volume and, therefore, have diminished impact as they fade) and culturally and linguistically; if someone in the audience is culturally or linguistically removed from the story—perhaps speaking another language and so not understanding, or approaching the subject matter from a radically different perspective, or even perhaps finding the culture of the storyteller alien—then the impact of the story, the intensity with which it may affect that person, is diminished.

The Abonwabisi Brothers, despite being Xhosa and having mostly grown up in the pre-1994 Cape Province, choose to sing in the *isicathamiya* style. The lyrics of the Abonwabisi Brothers' song about coming home are in Zulu, and yet the song emotionally affected the Xhosa gentleman standing next to me during its performance. Multilingualism is common in South Africa and he was not struggling to understand the words, but if we compare his response to mine, we can clearly see that without his interpretation and translation I would have thought the music and singing beautiful, but the full impact of its complex message and meaning would have been lost on me. Even with the translation, I was less affected than he was. Linguistically, being an English speaker, I was outside the storyfield. My translator may have been Xhosa, but he could understand the lyrics of the song, hence it had a greater impact on him than on me. He could personally and culturally relate to the

message of the performance as he, unlike myself, has had practical experience of the problem being sung about and the emotional pain attached to it. We can therefore place him much closer to the source of the storyfield and hence he is far more likely (as he was) to be emotionally affected by its impact.

One necessary consideration is that the act of communicating a story or 'storytelling' must by its very definition be *multi-directional*; one person is communicating the story *towards* another. Another is *receiving it* and *reflecting a response* back, which in turn may impact the flow, pace, and subject matter of story. The storyteller, in this case the source of the storyfield, is communicating to many people simultaneously, i.e. it is *omni-directional* as well, but this does nothing to negate each line of communication as a directional interaction. The performer might not be aware of each line of communication, he might not be aware of members of his audience at all during the performance, but they are still within his storyfield. (I am aware that this is a very limited, simplistic look at what is an interesting system of communication that is far more complicated than can be fully discussed here.)

The Abonwabisi Brothers may be performing to a crowd of which my companion and myself are but two people, but they are communicating directly with him and with myself separately. We each receive and reflect back an individual line of communication, which is very different in nature, and differently positioned within the storyfield.

'I Need Love'

Performed by Andrew Peters (guitar and voice), next to the food tent at the Grahamstown Festival in the late morning on 5 of July 2007. The weather was cool, but sunny.

Sitting on a white plastic chair beneath a red umbrella that doesn't belong to him, Andrew Peters strums his guitar and throws his thin, reedy voice as far as he can into the crowd.

'I need love, I need love, I need love, real love.'

The crowd sitting at the nearby tables and milling around in the thin winter sunshine, have not gathered to hear him. They have come to eat. But gathered in the tented 'food court' area they have no choice but to hear his performance as he has firmly planted himself in their soundscape. For the most part they seem to be ignoring him. Children are running around, adults glance over and then avert their gaze, as if

too much of their attention would necessitate the obligation of a donation. Would seal a deal they don't want to make. No one gets too close.

Andrew is wearing a red T-shirt, which is clean, and his grey beard is fairly neatly trimmed, his guitar is in good condition and at his feet is a simple collection box, with a pile of CDs leaning against it. But his eyes are rheumy and he looks battered with age and perhaps alcohol.

'Only a hundred rands for my CD,' he cajoles, having leapt up and brought one over to me. 'My music is unique, the professor at the university told me himself. I play everything—reggae, rock, blues.' I tell him I don't have enough cash on me, but he doesn't give up. Andrew has learnt to be a hard sell. 'But then go and get some. There is a cash machine not far, you will come back? You wont let me down will you?'

My interest and my presence—holding my camera, with my notebook and recording device hanging around my neck—is starting to attract attention and Andrew is suddenly keen that I stay. People are watching, particularly a small group of children, whose parents are sitting nearby, and who have come to stand a safe distance away and stare. One of them darts forward and puts a one rand coin in Andrew's collection box. He calls after the children as they run away, waving at their parents,

'Thank you and God bless you.'

He has been paid to play and so now will play. He begins his song again — slightly self-consciously, as he performs both for his new mildly interested audience, and for my camera. His guitar playing is a simple strumming that allows him to keep one eye out for audience members who might be talked into a CD or 'a little donation'. The song consists of a rhythmic looping motive, going nowhere, leading to nothing, with little dynamic or emotional range. His voice is tremulous, but still solidly repetitive, his attention elsewhere.

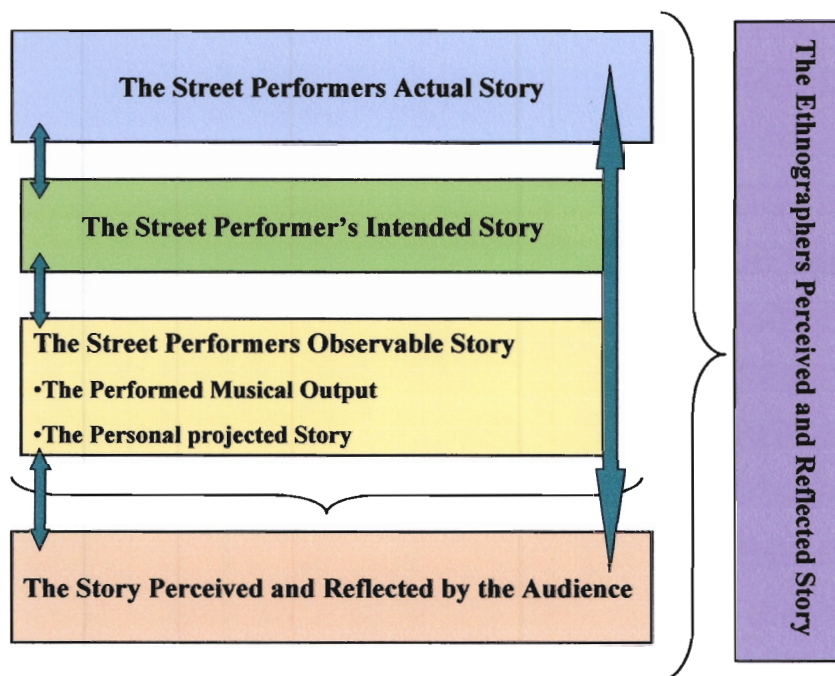
*'I need love, I need love I need love.
I need love, I need love I need love.
Real Love. Oooh Love.'*

Types of storyfields

Andrew's performance that I have described above is a physically and temporally restricted construct. He places himself purposely in a busy place and he then makes sounds that are loud enough to spread to a certain frequency radius around

him. In his case these sounds are music (the lyrics of his songs sung with his guitar playing). Andrew also projects an image (which is both auditory and visual, voluntary and involuntary) to the audience members within this frequency diameter as well as those who can see, but not hear him. This image consists of what he is wearing (eye-catching red T-shirt), how he looks physically (bloodshot eyes and thin frame), how he moves (head dipped, almost subservient), what he chooses to say (that the local music professor has praised his originality, ‘You wont let me down will you?’) and how he says it (his cajoling, encouraging or grateful tone of voice), how he positions himself (sitting still as opposed to standing or dancing) and where he chooses to position himself (next to the food tent, beneath a red, eye-catching, umbrella). Andrew hopes that the combination of all the above will encourage the audience (whether they have chosen to be audience members or not) to give him money. He is, as has been explored in the previous chapter, trying to maximise his advantages.

Andrew would like to project an image, a story that he hopes his audience will perceive to be valuable enough for them to pay for. His personal story: where he lives, how good his musical training is, whether the professor really did compliment him, and meant his compliment or was merely being polite, if Andrew really is a clean, good-living man, whether he really needs love or not, is only partially expressed, or perhaps even deliberately obscured.



A model representing the interaction between storyfields

The audience can only observe what is presented to them during that performance and make their evaluation based on their interpretation of the story they are encouraged to perceive. If, like myself, they are watching his performance with great concentration, after having watched a number of his performances—looking for clues as to his actual story, interviewing him, as I have done—then they might build a different image of him. They would piece together a detailed ethnography.

Illustrated above is a complex picture of overlapping storyfields, inherent in all musical street performances, none of which can be ignored or marginalized, because they are all completely interconnected, and interdependent.

The street performer's personal story

This is the street performer's real life experience; where he lives, what his real name is, what his financial situation is, which social group he belongs to, what language he speaks, etc. These points are just the beginning of what could become a very detailed story.

The street performer's intended story

The street performer decides which story he would like to project—this choice might be a representation of his personal story—and he decides in which direction to project it i.e. who his intended target audience is. This story may have a single or a combination of intended functions, examples of which could be:

- To earn money
- To further a cause i.e. political.
- To entertain
- To educate

The street performer's observable story

This is conveyed by:

- **The performed musical output** (sometimes including sung or spoken lyrics)
All the components making up the performed musical output: the lyrics, the music and the artists choice of performance media (including instruments, costumes, props and choice of location and setting) are all *part* of the street performer's observable story. They cannot be neatly separated into

conveyancing subsections as they are all intrinsically vehicle *and message* themselves.

- **The street performer's personal projected story** This is the story the performer projects (both actual and fabricated, intentional and unintentional) about themselves. It is a projected story, and its direct interpretation is often left to the audience. Occasionally the performer will take time to explain his story directly in a pre or post-performance speech.

The story perceived and reflected by the audience

This is a very complex and rich interaction and one that would require a very detailed analysis to properly explore. To maintain clarity I will restrict this representation to these two simplified groupings.

- **Perceived:** As explored in the case of the Abonwabisi Brothers, each audience member may perceive a different meaning or be impacted in a different way by the street performer's observable story. A foreign tourist may perceive an observable story in a vastly different way to a local from the same town, language group or ethnicity as the street performer.
- **Reflected:** The audience member then reflects a response to this observable story. They put money in the street performers collection plate, they walk away, they applaud, they sing and dance along or they ignore the performance.

The ethnographer's perceived and reflected Story

The ethnographer's position can be kept as a separate category as she is both part of the audience (perceiving and reflecting the street performer's observable story), and sometimes part of the street performer's observable story itself, as in the case of the Impala Cultural Group performance described in the previous chapter. The ethnographer is also sometimes in possession of background information about the street performers intent, their personal story and the story perceived and reflected by other audience members.

Representing Andrew Peters' performance

This approach and model can now be applied to Andrew Peters' street performance:

Andrew Peters' personal story

The guitarist and singer, Andrew Peters

- He is a professional musician.
- He works only as a street performer.
- He has been playing since he was 13 and is now 60 years old.
- He did many shows, concerts and performances as a child.
- He lives in a township and is desperately poor.
- He makes an average of 60 rands a day.
- He has four children, his wife died a few years ago and he now has a girlfriend.
- He says he plays because he needs to support his children. He says he; 'loves his babies. Really, really loves his babies.'

Andrew Peters' intended story

- He is a serious musician, one who has brought out an audio CD, has received validating praise from the Professor of Music at Rhodes University, Grahamstown and can play in many different styles ('Reggae, rock and blues').
- He is clean living. A fairly well off professional who can afford to dress well.
- His music is valued. (Andrew places a 10 rand note in his collection box at the beginning of his session. This is a common ploy used by street musicians, an encouraging 'value indicator', a bit like an auctioneer's opening bid.)
- He is directing his intended story at the more affluent section of Grahamstown's festival-going population. Those who can afford to buy relatively expensive food.

Music and lyrics:

- He would like to make money with his music so he intersperses his performance with calls for donations and plays songs that he believes his audience will find pleasant.
- His songs are all about giving and receiving love, his music is easy to listen to and unchallenging. He sticks to easily recognisable genres and repetitive song forms.

Andrew Peters' observable story

- His lyrics are difficult to decipher, as his singing is unclear.
- Each song is very similar to the last—they are undistinguishable.
- Personal story: His clothes are clean, but he himself isn't and he looks unwell.

Andrew Peters' story perceived and reflected by the audience

- The audience does not seem to be very sympathetic towards Andrew; for the most part they appear to ignore him.
- Andrew's music does not appear to be engaging them emotionally.
- They do not find him appealing: a very thin, unhealthy-looking elderly man, who sings weakly.
- His material is not original.
- He is not very valuable to them: his collection box remains empty apart from the odd coin.

The ethnographer's perceived and reflected story

- Having gathered some details about Andrew's personal story my perspective is different. I am not simply watching a street musician, I am watching the performance of someone who I have met and talked to. I have interviewed him and pieced together an understanding of his background. I have developed empathy for him and his situation and can therefore no longer be neutral.

The value of representing and modelling storyfields

Street musicians in South Africa operate in a complex performance environment. Certain aspects have been identified as unique to, or particularly relevant to South African streets as performance environments and how street musicians maximise their success within this environment. These include the fact that collaboration is common, that performers are often musically inclusive of each other's styles and genres and the lack of containment, both physically and socially, of both the performer and his audience—the audience is fluid and the performer therefore must be flexible. Lastly the impact of the immediacy of the feedback received requires the performer's variably skilful use of framing techniques. Within this environment the street performer and his audience set up and exchange a complicated interlocking system of storyfields.

In chapter one it was explained that because of the fluidity of the street environment and also of the material performed, single musical narrative items would be individually examined only in how they were representative of aspects of the performance environment and patterns of behaviour these caused and inspired.

The more clearly this system is understood the easier it is to draw conclusions from it. I have used the above model to simply represent how these behavioural components interact, how storyfields (as zones of human interaction) influence each other.

Shaka's story

A history of a Zulu king as narrated and performed by The Impala Cultural Group in the late afternoon on 5 July 2007 in the Church Square in Grahamstown. The weather is sunny and clear, but cold.

We're all crouched on the ground in a tight circle and it's getting cold as shadows start to pool, but the seven men I'm sitting with are still dripping with sweat from their last performance, still on a buzz. I have asked the Impala Cultural Group to do something



Vicky telling Shaka's story

unusual; I have asked them to first tell me the story of the performance they are about to enact. So we are seated on the ground while they animatedly chant and ululate⁸, even breaking into occasional singing, as they collectively tell me their version of the story of Shaka, most famous of the Zulu leaders, his rise to power and his murder at the hands of his own half-brothers; Dingane and Mhlangana⁹. It seems a fitting choice of story as, together, the Impala Cultural Group look rather like they are part of an impi¹⁰. Strung with beads and hung with animal skins and tails, they are

⁸ 'Ululate, v. To howl or wail; to lament loudly.' *Oxford English Dictionary*. <http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/display/50261556?keytype=ref&ijkey=sSoYHkLafAZs>.

⁹ There is debate around the validity of different historical versions of this story. Here, only the version of Shaka's history told to me by the Impala Cultural Group, will be represented.

¹⁰ 'Impi' described in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as 'A body of Bantu warriors; a force, detachment, army'. <http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/display/50113031?keytype=ref&ijkey=q/>.

carefully dressed and intricately decorated in Zulu costume, their torsos and feet are bare¹¹ and they are carrying weaponry.

We're sitting in an open area in the middle of a busy outdoor market, kneeling and crouching on the tarmac of a square and despite our blatant obstruction, the throngs of people walking past are giving us a wide berth. As storyteller and leader, Zola 'Vicky' Faku is seated on one of the low drums. His face is zigzagged with stripes of paint and his gestures are wide and expressive as he proudly paints the history of a people that are not strictly his own. Vicky is not merely telling me the story, he is performing it, he glares and smiles and gestures. He pauses dramatically and points heavenward and earthwards.

Reaching his arms forwards and backwards along imaginary timelines. He clicks his tongue in frustration at my slowness to grasp a long Zulu genealogical line. He throws his head back to literally howl with the enormity and wonder of the magnificence of this history and his group are following every sentence, totally involved. They scatter their interjections through his speech. They hum and grunt with approval and growl out repetitions of the names of the characters they don't like. They nod their heads and clap their hands at the good bits. They fill in the names for the long lines of descendants. They echo the important sentences for emphasis.

'Now Zulu kaNtombela grew up to be a man, and a great king.'

('UmmmHmm')

'And got married.'

'Now all their descendants... they proudly carried his name. The Zulu tribe.'



An Impala member demonstrating Zulu weaponry

79JYC0pE0Lo This word is commonly understood in South Africa to mean a fast-moving, Zulu fighting and raiding unit of soldiers.

¹¹ Vicky tells me that Shaka insisted that his *impi*'s ran and fought bare-footed, as he believed it sped them up, enabling them to fight and move silently and easily.

(‘Proudly carried his name’)

The line of kings leading down to Shaka is passed around the circle, from person to person.

‘Gumede kaZulu’

‘Phunga kaGumede’

‘Mageba kaGumede’

‘Ndaba kaMageba’

‘Jama kaNdaba’

Although Vicky is still speaking, as he tells me this history, his group is responding more and more as they would if he were singing it. They are rhythmically intoning and speak-singing along with him. I am reminded of Reuben Caluza’s description of Zulu music. Himself a Zulu choral instructor, he writes that, ‘(...) Zulu songs are developed in company with bodily and rhythmic movements. Some tunes have no words at all. A Zulu singer hums a tune or sings meaningless exclamatory syllables, such as ‘oha!’ ‘oham!’ ‘Oji!’’ (Caluza 2005: 29).

Vicky’s story is long and takes many twists and turns as he has decided that my knowledge of Zulu history must be complete to understand his songs, but there is a small crowd gradually gathering, the children standing closest, just outside our circle. Staring, listening, captured. The nature of the story circle is changing.

‘But during the second half of the 18th century, Jama kaNdaba’s son Senzangakhona became the chief of the Zulus; from then things started to happen fastly. Senzangakhona felt in love with Nandi.’

(‘The sweet one’)

‘But you see they should not have done that...’

(‘No! No!’)

‘Because they were closely related as part of the Elangeni tribe and then those people said to them they must break it off... but by the time they broke it off... it was too late... Nandi was already pregnant!’



The crowd around us is growing steadily. Overcoming their shyness the children have crept ever closer, a very young boy is standing so close to me that he is absentmindedly leaning on my shoulder. He stares fixedly at Vicky, listening intently. 'Then the Zulu people said to Nandi that she must go... and her child became known as... Shaka!' A great air-splitting cry goes up from the Impala group, the child beside me flinches, but he cannot tear his eyes away.

'Shaka!' The kudu horn is blown and Vicky's voice becomes stronger, he is performing as an orator now, aware of the large crowd, but still appearing to be keeping his attention within the circle. The crowd completely surrounds us. People are craning to see from behind others. This is becoming a performance with a big audience.

'The early life of this great man became very unstable,' he continues, more softly now. 'His mother was not wanted by her own people, not accepted by the Zulus, and so she had to go from tribe to tribe seeking for a shelter and food.'

'So it meant that for this young boy, he had to fight... he had to fight, day in and day out protecting his mother. While defending himself.'

'Ewe!'¹² The Impalas groan in sympathy and understanding.

'No wonder...' Vicky cuts in. 'No wonder when he became a grown man, he became very angry. Brave! A fearless man who always lead his impi in front.' Vicky's voice drops again. 'He was such an angry man that he even started defeating tribes and clans around Kwazulu!'

'Kwazulu!'

'And others became the Zulus – and that is why they are in the majority today.'

He pauses and, as if noticing them for the first time, looks around the crowd.

'Shaka, this brilliant king-general, whose formations even helped the Zulus to defeat the British at the Battle of Isandlwana...'

'Isandlwana!' The crowd is starting to participate in these exclamations.

'He was such an angry man that he was even assassinated by one of his dear brothers... Dingane!'

'Dingane!' The Impalas whistle and growl with disgust.

'And so,' Vicky concludes, rising to his feet, 'that is the end of our brilliant king-general. King Shaka!' And with his last explosive shout the drumming begins

¹² Xhosa, yes.

and Vicky leaps forward into the centre of the circle to dance. The crowd, which is now about eighty strong and still growing fast, moves back to clear a larger circle and the whole story begins again, in Xhosa, as a sung, danced, enacted performance.

Towards conclusions

In a paper entitled ‘Musical sound and contextual input: a performance model for musical analysis’, Regula Burckhardt Qureshi proposes a paradigm for the field of ethnomusicology:

‘Music is a system of sound communication with a social use and a cultural context.’ Such a system can be analysed in terms of its sound structure only, and the results may either point to universal features of music or they may identify musical characteristics particular to cultural regions, periods, or styles. (...) But what analysing music in purely abstract structural terms does not provide, is an understanding of the dynamic that motivates the production of music, i.e., the meaning or significance of the sound system in terms of the social use and cultural context—referential meaning in the widest sense of the word. Yet much musical experience does raise this fundamental question about the nature of music: how does musical sound become meaningful outside of itself? (Burckhardt Qureshi 1987: 57)

Vuyani believes that the stories he tells are meaningful. He believes that he and his group fulfil a valuable social function, that they are an inspiration to and represent those who do not have the gift of music. Zola ‘Vicky’ Faku of the Impala Cultural Group lives in Faku Street in the township of Paterson in the Eastern Cape; his community has recognised his contribution. He tells the crowd: ‘I am not sleeping because I am working for my children’ and they mummer and nod in agreement. He is their mouthpiece, their clown, their historian and their entertainer. Goodman plays only for his God, but his awkward music captures those who walk past. Vincent from the African Dream Marimba Band learnt to play music at his church in Guguletu. I ask him if he feels closer to God when he plays and he just laughs. ‘Here? No. Here I must play for money... but in my heart I play for God.’ The Abonwabisi Brothers are proud of what they do, each movement is an intended, rehearsed gesture. They sing each word with meaning.

The Impala Cultural Group sang and danced well into the evening after they had finished telling the story of Shaka, and their audience stayed for the entire duration of the performance. That performance will never be repeated, the Impalas are constantly changing and reworking and improvising around their material, and as

Vicky says, they need to feed off the spirit of *that* particular audience. So, then, what is the importance of this one musical storytelling event?

The value of the conclusions that can be drawn from an individual storytelling event is discussed in the next chapter. Here I recognise that there is value in the *experience* of the event, the experience of the impact of the musical storyfields. I have tried to describe and represent those I have experienced as faithfully as I can and Blacking's (1995: 31) description of music seems particularly relevant:

The function of music is to enhance in some way the quality of individual experience and human relationships; its structures are reflections of patterns of human relations, and the value of a piece of music as music is inseparable from its value as an expression of human experience.

Chapter Six

Summation and Conclusions

We might start by accepting that it is fruitless to try and define ‘music’. We will either leave something out or include a lot of noise. We might accept to that we should not expect anything like a fully scientific theory of something so fluid (Ball 2008:162).

(Ethnomusicologists) consider all musics worthy of study, recognising that all, no matter how apparently simple, are in themselves inordinately complex phenomena. And they believe that all musics are capable of imparting much of importance to the peoples to whom they belong, and to the world, and thus naturally also to the scholars who study them (Nettl 2005: 14).

In chapter one I asked what the significance of this study could be. I began to explore what the trends within the field of ethnomusicology currently are and where this study could be positioned within these movements. I asked what could be learnt from street musicians. In this chapter I broadly summarise this study and discuss the conclusions drawn. The topic of this study is:

‘We feed off the spirit of the audience’

An ethnographic study of musical storytelling in the street music of South Africa.

The South African context

South Africa, the macrostructure for the exploration of this topic, can be a brutal environment. The poor live an existence that is so far removed from the more affluent it seems that a yawning chasm, darkened with chronic social issues, divides them. South Africa’s recent history has been a turbulent, remarkable path leading from one opposing social and political structure to another, and this ongoing transition is beset with difficulties. In chapter two these difficulties were examined, particularly in relation to the impact they have on street musicians. The following were discussed: unemployment and its complex causes, health issues, xenophobia, violence, crime and

the harsh challenges associated with living in townships. Together, these create an environment that is fraught with difficulties, and it is unlikely that any of these social issues will improve dramatically in the foreseeable future. Those who live in the lower income sections of South African society are challenged with finding ways to survive.

Valued entrepreneurs

During the course of this study, it became clear that the majority of the street musicians working on South Africa's streets, that I was able to interact with, *viewed themselves as valued entrepreneurs*. Perhaps, unlike street performers in more affluent countries, South Africa presents such a difficult social, political and economic environment to live within, that wherever income-generating work—work that can provide a sense of giving value and also a sense of control over one's financial situation—can be created, that this is something to be proud of. Vicky and the Impala Cultural Group, the African Dream Marimba Band, Goodman and Mdu; none of these street musicians gave me any sense of viewing themselves as beggars.

In chapter one Mungo Park was quoted, discussing the value of the travelling musicians he encountered in West Africa in 1796. He described how these musicians were respected and admired by the communities they visited, fulfilling various social functions. Researching in 2008, I also encountered a sense of pride amongst the street musicians interviewed. I found indications that some of them were fulfilling valuable social functions. As illustrated in chapters three and five, Vuyani in particular, believes in the importance of his societal role. He is convinced of the value that the Ubuntu Cultural Dancers provide to the communities they visit. But it is not just the perceived value that street performers ascribe themselves that is important to my conclusions; it is the value that appears to be ascribed to them by their audiences, those who *experience* their performances.

At the end of the previous chapter the concept of placing value was briefly discussed. Whether monetary value or other, evaluating a street performance is a personal exercise. In chapter five the relevance of how distant an audience member was from the source of a storyfield was described and illustrated, it can be concluded that each audience member must evaluate differently. Each must listen and make a choice: stay and pay for the experience—an amount of their own choosing—or go. It is important to realise that a single musical storytelling street performance is an

elaborate, multifaceted communication between audience and performer. One, as has been mentioned previously, that allows for a far more immediate interaction than other types of performance.

The impact of tourism

The impact of South Africa's growing tourism industry was introduced in chapter two. Vicky, of the Impala Cultural Group, is the source of the quote that is the title of this study: 'We feed off the spirit of the audience' and the composition and location of this audience is very influential. Not just in where street musicians choose to perform, but more importantly, *what* they choose to perform. Chapter four looked more closely at how street musicians manage their various performance environments, and how many South African street musicians tailor their material, performance and appearance to cater for a foreign audience.

When I began this study I wasn't sure if this intentional visual and aural framing was purely a business decision or not. I have come to realise that the majority of the musicians that were part of the study, perform their music because they enjoy it and take pride in it. As discussed above, many of them derive a sense of value that is much greater than simply an economic one. The Impala Cultural Group are passionate about what they do. Their sense of pride and the validation they receive for their performances seems to almost override their financial concerns. They are exhilarated by their own musical storytelling, they are inspired and fuelled by their own street psych, and I

have observed them continuing to perform, even when their audience was not paying them, or perhaps in some instances *could* not pay them.

VukuZenzele, the Abonwabisi Brothers and the African Dream Marimba Band are all examples of street musicians performing what is widely understood to be South African 'traditional' music. These styles of performance: *isicathamiya* singing and choreography, throat singing and



The Abonwabisi Brothers

traditional South African melodies played on marimba, are all associated with, and have become part of South Africa's musical heritage.

It can be concluded that tourism plays a significant role in encouraging South African street musicians to adhere to more traditional styles of music and performance, and hence to inadvertently become part of the active preservation of these genres of music. If the tourism industry continues to grow and prosper, this influence might increase and this is particularly relevant, as the formal music recording industry in South Africa leans more and more towards producing music that is heavily influenced by the popular music of Europe and the USA.

Ethnic diversity and inclusion

Musical flexibility is often and proudly talked of. The Abonwabisi Brothers tell me they are Xhosa, but they sing and perform a predominantly Zulu genre. The Impala Cultural Group alternate their costumes and their material. One day they will



A member of the Impala Cultural Group

include in his repertoire, the better.

This was an unexpected outcome and I found it surprising how musically inclusive South Africa's street musicians are. This stylistic diversity could be a response to how tough and fluid the South African street is as a performance space. Chapters two and three indicate how difficult this environment is to manage and

wear costumes that include Xhosa (Mpondo) elements, the next day Zulu and the next Tswana. They change the subject matter of their musical performances accordingly, and make a point of describing this daily transition to me. The Ubuntu Cultural Group gave me a list—cited previously—of musical styles that Vuyani claims they 'draw inspiration from'. It appears that the longer the list of different types of music, from different South African ethnic groupings, that a street performer can

manipulate advantageously, and how crucial it is that the street musician is financially effective. If local audience members are more affected by, and therefore perhaps more likely to pay for, material that is culturally and linguistically familiar to them, then it is possible that the more widely the street performer can cast his musical ‘net’ of ‘traditional’ sounds the better.

Collaboration

Performing in such an unforgiving environment causes another surprising behaviour: street musicians often operate collaboratively. Chapter four describes how—instead of competing for the most frequented and therefore desirable performance locations—street musicians at the Grahamstown Festival cooperate and support each other. There are a number of different musical street acts at the festival, all of whom are hoping to earn their share of the informal entertainment revenue available. There is no external regulation of these street musicians and entertainers, and yet I observed that each group or individual would perform only one set at each of the various prime locations in the centre of the town, before moving on and allowing another group the opportunity to ‘take a turn’. I also noticed that groups or individual performers would attend and sometimes actively support another’s performance. They were seen clapping and participating enthusiastically, becoming active audience members. The entire Ubuntu Cultural Group, shepherded by Vuyani, was often seen standing patiently awaiting their turn and watching another groups performance. In this instance competing in an inhospitable environment was more costly than collaborating within it.

Operating in a fluid environment

Street performers express their art in a fluid environment, a space that is a complex compilation of physical and imaginative aspects. In chapter three it was explored how this environment can encourage a sense of liberation, perhaps even rebellion. It can allow both performer and audience the opportunity to communicate with each other in a far more direct manner than other, more formalised, performance environments. One might argue that this could be an ideal environment for a creative artist to work within. The graffiti artist Banksy, discussed in chapter three, is a good example of an artist who is manipulating the benefits of this environment to his advantage. I encountered different manifestations of street psych. The Impalas seem

to take full advantage of the freedom that is available to them. Their attitude is one of joyous, exuberant expression. Drummer X is also perhaps another example, but, like Banksy, he prefers to exercise the advantage of being able to protect his anonymity.

None of the South African musicians that I interviewed complained of being restricted by the authorities at all. Unlike in other parts of the world, street musicians in this country do not appear to feel curtailed on the open street by the local police in any way. Inside gated communities restrictions are applied, for example the V&A Waterfront, but this is an environment that despite regulating the street performers who work within its boundaries, is encouraging of what they do.

The very fluid nature of the street comes with dangers as well. In South Africa, as in other parts of the world, the street has a dark side. South African street musicians may not complain of being curtailed by local law enforcement, but they do complain of not benefiting from its protection.

During the course of this thesis it has been established that, for a South African street musician to maximise his financial success in this environment he should cultivate his musical skills until he is extremely agile at reworking and improvising around his existing material, and he is able to quickly incorporate new material. He must visually and aurally frame himself advantageously, and he must *communicate* with his audience effectively. He must tell them far more than just the story inherent in his act. If the commuters that walked past Joshua Bell in the L'Enfant Plaza station in downtown Washington did or did not pay him for his exquisite music, did not determine if he ate a meal that day. The Ubuntu Cultural Dancers and the Impala Cultural Group however, are forced to stay aware of the fact that if they do not effectively communicate with their audience, they might suffer for it.

The ethnographer's story

In chapter one it was suggested that the apparent boundary between scholar and practitioner has been gradually dissolving for some time. This is not a radical statement; Finnegan (2007:197) writes that there is widespread questioning of the once dominant 'objective research' model—of the 'researcher' as sitting apart from the subject-of-investigation. She states that 'participation' is no longer an automatically derogatory term and the once standard opposition between 'researcher' and 'researched' now looks over-simple.

Kisliuk (1997: 41), cited in chapter one, summarises succinctly: ‘The challenge to ethnomusicologists is to create ethnographies of musical performance that are fully experiential’. In chapter five the experienced performance event and the complexities inherent in this communicative system, was examined. The discussion of the interaction between storyfields highlighted how street performing essentially consists of many *multidirectional communications*, and how the effectiveness of these communications is vital to the success of the storytelling event.

Relevance

In chapter one I quoted and discussed Blacking’s description of his understanding of ethnomusicology: ‘A discipline that combines scientific and humanistic methods of research to study human musical communication’ (Blacking 1992: 86). Nettl (2005: 433), writing about ethnomusicology during and beyond the 1990s, in what he called a ‘new era’, includes an overview about the progress of thought within the field:

Beginning with attempts to see the whole musical world in its diversity and its unity, we moved to a high degree of specialisation, but now that the world has, as we often hear, shrunk to a ‘global village’, we are again becoming interested in the course of human music in its entirety, particularly the most recent segment of its history. We see the world as a set of issues, valid everywhere, to be debated, and less as a group of repertoires.

He describes ethnomusicology as a very ‘flexible discipline’ (Nettl 2005: 454), one that is well positioned to benefit from,

(...) learning further from anthropology, musicology, folklore, cognitive sciences, biology, and other disciplines and fields more recently developed, in order to be able to continue our claim that our field is the one that deals with the issues that are most fundamental for understanding the music in human life, and in the world (Nettle 2005: 454).

If ethnomusicology is the study of human interaction, as Blacking describes of ‘human communication’, and if its practitioners are academia’s egalitarians and musicology’s scientists, then that suggests that the field is constantly reaching in new directions, and into new fields to gain a greater understanding of the overall function and relevance of music. If to work in the field of ethnomusicology is to attempt to find a greater understanding of humanity through exposure to, study and contextualisation of the world’s music, then I believe that this study has relevance. It has begun to explore what has proved to be a complex, interesting and unusual area of

human musical communication. One that I believe still has much to explore and that would reward further study.

In chapter one I proposed that the streets of South Africa would be a good place to find humanity. They are.

Members of the Impala Cultural Group performing



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