

EXPRESSING SOUTH AFRICAN MUSICAL SENSIBILITIES IN JAZZ:  
THE CULTURAL RELEVANCE OF JOHN COLTRANE AND THE  
MUSICAL IMPACT OF MCCOY TYNER

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## **Declaration**

I hereby declare that the work submitted is my own and has not been used for any other submission purposes at any institution. References and discography have been listed accordingly.

Signature: 

Signed by candidate
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Date: 26.06.2025

## Abstract

This paper seeks to explore the cultural and spiritual relevance of John Coltrane (1926-1967) and the musical impact of McCoy “Alfred” Tyner (1938-2020) on two contemporary South African pianists, with a focus on the music of Afrika Mkhize and Nduduzo Makhathini, as well as an insider’s perspective of this subject in light of my own music, as a South African pianist.

McCoy Tyner and John Coltrane are most famous for playing in the Coltrane classic quartet comprised of McCoy Tyner (piano), Jimmy Garrison/Steve Davis (bass), Elvin Jones (drums) and John Coltrane (saxophone) from the early to mid 1960s. The classic “Coltrane quartet sound” is tightly linked with the modal jazz sub-style and is marked by members’ contributions such as Tyner’s distinct minor, quartal and suspended harmonic voicings, Jones’s extensive use of cross rhythms and dynamic intensity, Garrison’s rhythmic drive and Coltrane’s unique timbre on the tenor and soprano saxophone.

Afrika Mkhize and Nduduzo Makhathini are contemporary local pianists who have contributed to current SA jazz repertoire. Several aspects of their music such as harmony, melodic phrasing, composition or underlying ideology display features reminiscent of Tyner and/or Coltrane. The primary point of departure is to explore possible reasons Tyner and Coltrane have impacted Mkhize and Makhathini (musically and otherwise). By paralleling the discourse of 1960s Black America (in which Coltrane’s early works are situated) with cultural interests held by contemporary SA jazz artists, this paper evaluates how these discourses coincide, thereby answering the question: why are the musical aesthetics of Coltrane and Tyner relevant in echoing a South African jazz sensibility?

The primary question is explored primarily through discussing the significance of spirituality as well as understanding why Coltrane’s integration of Indian and African musical elements make him a point of interest for contemporary South African musicians. The second question argues the significance of McCoy Tyner’s harmonic language in aiding a South African sensibility in jazz, through analysing the extent to

which Tyner's minor- and quartal-based harmonies are apparent within these SA jazz pianists' compositional and improvisational style.

## **Dedication and Acknowledgements**

This paper is a testament of what God has done in my life, forever faithful you are Lord, I thank you.

I would like to acknowledge my parents who sacrificed so much for me that I may have the best education, for valuing education, for being attentive to my natural inclination toward music and for believing in my decisions. Thank you, I would not be here without you.

Thank you to my fiancé, Lonwabo Mafani, for your undying support and for being such an amazing father to our daughter, Langaletu.

Thank you to my supervisors Prof Bruinders and Dr Deja for your time and patience spent with me over a long period of working on this project. I am forever grateful.

I dedicate this project to young South African artists. I pray you seek the truth in whatever you do and I hope you enjoy the journey of finding your voice within this music.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 My Encounter with the Music of John Coltrane and McCoy Tyner

*“Every musician should have their own way of getting through a tune.”*

- Mark Fransman (personal communication)

During my childhood years, I was exposed to many different types of jazz albums, especially having a father who practiced jazz guitar in the home. I fell in love with music from a young age. Many years later, in 2014, I enrolled to study jazz at university. During my four years of undergraduate jazz studies, I found that the focus was on “early bop”<sup>1</sup> musicians mostly: the solos of Charlie Parker, Bud Powell and Dizzy Gillespie. These “early bop” players were often deemed as the main “school of jazz”; less emphasis was placed on the earlier swing period<sup>2</sup> as well as the later modal jazz<sup>3</sup> period. Early bop players offered phrases from the jazz canon that assisted me in getting acquainted with the style on a technical level. However, from a cultural standpoint, as someone situated within a South African context, I knew there was more work and/or discoveries that I would need to come across in order to find my personal voice.

During my studies, there was always a notion casually posed to us by our professors of “finding your own voice” as a jazz player, that after studying the greats, one ought to have their own way of delivering their music (Yanow 2000, 377). Having interviewed various artists in New York city, Jackson (2000, 36-37) quotes saxophonists Steve Wilson and Antonio Hart that one of the most important qualities of a player is having a personal identity in the music. As a result, in my study of jazz, I have had to find my own interests and interpretations of jazz, both during my studies and as a practicing

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<sup>1</sup> The ‘bop’ period was an era in jazz between the early 1940s to 1960s that defines the existing jazz canon (Steinberger 1998, 122-123). Innovators of ‘early bop’ or bebop include, Charlie Parker, Bud Powell and Dizzy Gillespie, Max Roach, and Thelonious Monk, amongst others (Yanow 2000, 44-73). The style is defined by intricate harmony and improvisational phrasing, complex rhythms and often fast tempos.

<sup>2</sup> An era in jazz spanning the early 1930s to 1940s. The swing era was dominated by big band music and was more concerned with playing jazz for entertainment and dance. Swing jazz featured less improvisation and more arrangement.

<sup>3</sup> Prominent from the late 1950s, modal jazz features include modal harmony, restricted use of elaborate chord progressions, suspended bass pedal points, harmonic ambiguity and improvisation using modes (Waters 2011).

musician. A significant encounter was coming across the music of Coltrane and Tyner in 2015 when a trumpeter and friend of mine shared an album entitled *Coltrane Plays the Blues*. Coltrane's music, for me, was the most compelling example of having a distinct voice in jazz, moreover, I felt as though his music sounded closest to the type of jazz I envisioned playing as a South African musician. There were certain musical aesthetics that resonated with me on a deeper cultural level.

Upon listening to *Coltrane Plays the Blues*, what struck me was not just the overall dynamic sound of the quartet, but Tyner's strong sense of rhythm, especially in his left hand (Porter 1998, 178). Furthermore, it seemed as though Tyner's harmonic language built on fourth voicings characterised the quartet (ibid., 179), giving it a distinct sound. The fourth voicings seemed to give the music an openness and wandering sound that fostered an in-depth extemporisation, especially for Coltrane (ibid., 177). These were some of the elements that first piqued my interest in this music and stood in noticeable contrast to what bebop offered, especially in developing my own sound – one that resonated with me as a South African.

On the other hand, as an avid spectator of jazz in the South African music scene, I came across artists like Afrika Mkhize, Nduduzo Makhathini, Bokani Dyer, Thandi Ntuli, Linda Sikhakhane and Sisonke Xonti who expressed musical traits, that I could trace back to either Coltrane or Tyner; either in their compositions or ways of approaching improvisation. In a workshop held by pianist Thandi Ntuli at the Makhanda Jazz Festival, I recall her saying that there was a period during her studies at university when she was obsessed with Tyner's playing. Similarly, I remember a conversation with Makhathini where he stated that years back, during his practice sessions, he would stay up late at night trying to figure out what Tyner was doing on the piano. Upon noticing that the affinity toward Tyner and Coltrane was apparent in the music of some contemporary SA jazz artists, it became a crucial inspiration of mine to better understand how the musical styles and discourses of John Coltrane and McCoy Tyner situated in 1960s America paralleled modern South African jazz styles and discourses.

## **1.2 Locating South African Jazz: Cultural and Spiritual Ties**

Although this paper fundamentally deals with two South African artists, it is concerned with the particular *sound*<sup>4</sup> that spawned out of the Johannesburg area from the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (up to the time of this writing). This sound was and is currently being forged by several individuals—musicians such as Afrika Mkhize, Andile Yenana, Nduduzo Makhathini, Bokani Dyer, Benjamin Jephtha, Thandi Ntuli and Sisonke Xonti, to name a few. These artists, arguably, are playing a pivotal role in taking South African jazz to newer musical dimensions that fuse indigenous South African musics with American and European jazz, to form a contemporary musical synthesis – one that has become increasingly more recognized on the international stages as the current “South African jazz sound” (though the SA jazz sound is not limited to these key players). This sound is not bound to what was previously understood as “traditional” SA jazz, often rooted in styles like *marabi*, *mbaqanga* or *kwela*.<sup>5</sup> Rather, styles such as modal jazz, the swing groove (especially the 6/8 Elvin Jones style of swinging)<sup>6</sup> are often fused with indigenous sounds and/or more popular American styles<sup>7</sup> like hip-hop and neo soul. These current artists have used their artistic voices to shape a contrasting sound and social direction that speaks to present-day cultural issues and musics while developing their individual voices. An example is Thandi Ntuli’s album entitled *Exiled* (2018). The word “exile” alludes to the historical legacy of being barred from one’s home country for political reasons during the apartheid regime. However, Ntuli extends “exile” as a metaphor: “My perception was that there’s some sense of exile, still. Even though we’ve passed political emancipation there are a lot of things which still feel displaced” (Mail and Guardian 2022).

Ntuli here highlights the struggles that black people may still be experiencing in South Africa, some of which can be seen in the protest manifestations of movements

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<sup>4</sup> Sound refers to the collective colours, intonation, rhythm and interplay within a jazz group by its members, that make it distinct.

<sup>5</sup> Marabi is a style of music that emerged in 1920s Johannesburg as Blacks became more urbanised. It’s influences include indigenous Zulu, Xhosa and Sesotho music, church hymns and Cape Malay sounds. Typically, a piano style, it can be recognized by its cyclical chord progression: I-IV-I (64)-V (or variations of such). Fragments of melodies would be taken from church hymns or popular music and were extemporized over this short repetitive cycle (Ballantine 2012, 34-35). *Mbaqanga* and *kwela* borrow the harmonic structure of marabi. These three styles have shaped the emergent SA jazz style.

<sup>6</sup> Examples include: *Siwa Sivuka* (Herbie Tsoaeli), *Echoes of You* (Makhathini), *Fezile* (Bokani Dyer), *Thembisa [The People]* (Andile Yenana) and *Homecoming* (Benjamin Jephtha).

<sup>7</sup> Examples include *Cosmic Light* by Thandi Ntuli and *Out of this World* by Siya Makuzeni (vocalist and trombonist).

such as #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall that occurred in 2015 and 2016, which saw the destruction of statues of colonial figures and the stabilising of the exponential cost of higher education. Many Black parents simply did not have the financial means to sustain their children's education, especially since the financial and geographic displacement of Black and Coloured families post-apartheid.

One of the significant factors shaping SA jazz today is spirituality. In defining the term spirituality, Bregman's definition is useful. She suggests that spirituality is the personal side of religion. It is inclusive of areas around one's life, such as family, or neighbourhood, and not necessarily particular to theology (Bregman 2004, 166). Since Bregman's definition situates spirituality outside of a particular religion, it opens itself up to universality—a theme prominent during the 1950s and 1960s United States—where jazz artists were looking for alternative ways of practicing spirituality (Berkman 2007, 43).

Spirituality in South African jazz can be pinpointed from the earlier works of saxophonist and flautist Zim Ngqawana (1959- 2011) and pianist Bheki Mseleku (1955-2008). Ngqawana strived for "self-development" in a transcendental sense, by ridding himself of any form of identity (Muller 2009, 120) and Mseleku is known for his engagement with jazz by viewing himself as a medium through which messages in music can be relayed from the spiritual realm (Talkin' Jazz 1994).

Spirituality ties in closely with some Black South African cultural practices in ritual, music and dance. In Zulu and Xhosa cultural practices, music is a fundamental aspect strongly linked with connecting to ancestral beings. Thus, it is certainly plausible that artists like Mseleku, Ngqawana and Makhathini for instance, have this sort of approach to jazz. Saxophonist Linda Sikhakhane (*Author Interview*, 15 April, 2022), also stated that what made Coltrane an influential figure for him was his ability to merge his music with his spiritual beliefs.

I contend that these spiritual discourses in SA jazz are often negotiated through modal jazz aesthetics. For instance, Makhathini's compositions often stress modal music environments that include the use of vamps or relying on fewer chords, both traits

found in modal jazz. Tunes which demonstrate this include *Waltz for Trane*, which features a 3-chord vamp, or *Supreme Light* and *Tyner's Visit*, which employ a minor mode as the tonal basis. The applicableness of modal jazz amongst artists concerned with spirituality is possibly due to modal jazz's harmonic spatiality that has been known to support in-depth musical expression. As a result, facilitates the application or experience of deeper cultural or even spiritual endeavours in jazz, as Makhathini highlights (discussed in 4.7).

Mkhize's music on the other hand offers a slightly different range of musical identities. His playing and compositional styles often include blues, gospel and jazz, expressed through his personal articulation, which also employs modal jazz techniques during improvisations as well as the use of fourth voicings and pentatonic scales popularized by McCoy Tyner. This does not exclude Makhathini's use of other genres in his music, but rather that Mkhize highlights the broader group of musical styles found in SA jazz (such as American and European music styles). However, his evident attention to Tyner's style of playing in various recordings, especially his improvisation, makes him a catalyst for understanding the musical impact of Tyner.

## **2. Methodology**

This research utilises a qualitative research model. This model allowed for the research to be involved from not only the musical, but also facilitated an in-depth look into the participants from their social perspective, environment and cultural background (Hitchcock and Hughes 2003, 12). Due to the nature of the study, which investigates both musical and cultural/spiritual matters, a qualitative research model assisted in better understanding the musical aspects in relation to the social commonalities between the South African and American artists in question.

Both primary and secondary data collection was used. Primary data consists of interviews and musical transcription. For the interviews, five participants were included: Afrika Mkhize, Nduduzo Makhathini, McCoy Mrubata (saxophonist), Sisonke Xonti (saxophonist) and Linda Sikhakhane (saxophonist). Due to the word count limitation (this being a mini dissertation/project) artists with evident musical influence

from either Coltrane or Tyner were selected for the interviews. Furthermore, even though the paper focuses on Mkhize and Makhathini, gaining insight from other key players (who are shaping the narrative and *sound* of contemporary SA jazz), gives the paper leverage in terms of understanding just how far Coltrane and Tyner's influence extends within contemporary SA jazz players. Regarding the interviews, contact was made with all participants, four responded, with the exception of Mkhize. The interviewees received an information sheet that explained what the project was about, as well as a consent form to sign. I made follow-up interviews with Makhathini, Xonti and Sikhakhane. Secondary sources were used for both focused artists (Makhathini and Mkhize), especially Afrika Mkhize (who I was not able to interview). These include books, journal articles, websites, online and television interviews (television interviews gave first-hand information about the artist) as well as drawing from personal communication I've had with both artists prior to embarking on this project.

The music transcriptions of all materials analysed by the author were done manually using a computer software application which allowed for the music to be slowed down for listening and transcription. Although there have been significant advancements in transcription methods invented over the years (Bhattarai and Lee 2023, 1) this manual approach was what I had access to.

The main obstacle in this research project was the limited information on Afrika Mkhize as mentioned. Though more communication with him would have certainly helped the project, it did not affect the overall research as I mostly researched his musical composition and improvisation.

A secondary obstacle is the word count limitation, for instance, I was unable to discuss in depth some other aspects of Tyner's, musical style, which influenced Mkhize's playing, such as his use of rhythm and four-note groupings in his improvisation (see Merrell II 2002, 100-101; Lilley 2020, 112-113 and Cousins 2020, 81). The musical traits that are included in the paper are therefore more significant for this research.

### **3. Literature and Scope**

In this paper I pay close attention to present day South African jazz artists Afrika Mkhize and Nduduzo Makhathini. I explore how Tyner's musical language facilitates a semblance of a South African sensibility, as expressed by both these artists in their compositions and improvisations through the use of Tyner's musical idiosyncrasies. These include the pentatonic scale, modes and minor based harmony, quartal voicings, the fourth and fifth interval, vamps and bass dyads. I also highlight the parallels of Coltrane's attraction to alternative spiritualisms and transnationalism in his music and how this resonates with Makhathini's ideas of tapping into liminal spaces during improvisation (Makhathini 2023, 67-68). Furthermore, Coltrane's spiritual explorations expressed mostly within his modal compositions and Makhathini's apparent modal-based pieces possibly illuminate parallels between 1960s US and twenty first century South African cultural priorities. This discourse is a niche discussion that comes with its limitations. I will refer to writings that are adjacent or that support ideas around this topic with the intention to contribute to existing literature within 21<sup>st</sup> century SA jazz.

The revival of the music of South African jazz pianist Bheki Mseleku, have highlighted significant literary contributions to his artistic practice. One of these is Andrew Lilley's 2020 book, which includes detailed musical transcriptions of some of Mseleku's pivotal works. It also offers a section on the effect Tyner's music has had on Mseleku's playing (106-114). Through transcription and video archives, Lilley finds that Mseleku can be viewed through the lens of the artists whose musical languages can be detected in his playing. These musicians are John Coltrane, Thelonious Monk and Bud Powell. He further describes Mseleku's musical choices that were influenced by Tyner. Lilley refers to fourth voicings derived from modes and the use of modes (especially through 4-note groupings of such) in Mseleku's improvised lines, which are evident in how Tyner constructs some of his improvised lines. Similarly, Cousins (2020, 91- 92), whilst maintaining that Mseleku's musical influences include bebop articulations that could be associated with either Bud Powell or Thelonious Monk, also concludes that there are striking comparable idiosyncrasies between Tyner and Mseleku's playing. The literature on Mseleku is of interest to this paper as both Mkhize and Makhathini have been affected by Mseleku's musicality (Makhathini 2018, 16; SABC 2015). Makhathini's master's dissertation which explores the cultural interests of Mseleku's music, notes Mseleku as one who shared a similar relation to the merging of music and spirituality as

Coltrane (Makhathini 2018, 60). He suggests that Mseleku's adoption of a universal consciousness speaks to American civil rights discourses that sought alternative manifestations of spiritual expression during the 1960s. He further extends this notion to the greater Black South African community, stating that this parallel between American civil rights discourses and the seeking of alternate spiritualisms by South Africans speaks more broadly to a departing from Western hegemonic systems (ibid., 55). Bheki Mseleku is a formative figure in South African jazz and has influenced a contingent of artists in SA—including those discussed in this paper (see Röntsch 2022, 16; SABC news 2015; Blue Notes Records *n.d*). Mseleku's piano playing has also impacted a younger generation of South African musicians. Claire Röntsch, in her master's dissertation discusses the intertextual relationship of Bokani Dyer and Thandi Ntuli in relation to Mseleku's music. Sibusiso Dlamini (2019, iii), in his master's dissertation that contributes toward a biography for Matshawandile "Andile" Yenana, states that "South African jazz studies does not have a similar body of literature [as the US] and academic work that could form a similar foundation for future critique and theorisation". This parallels the limitation of the scarce information on the life and music of Afrika Mkhize and thus provides motivation for including him in this study as someone who has greatly contributed to this country's jazz music. To my knowledge, there are no scholarly publications on Mkhize, but there are popular articles, website uploads and album reviews scattered across various media platforms. The bulk of this is in media coverage regarding his 2012 award as Standard Bank Young Artist, where he speaks briefly about his life, and album reviews of *Raindancer* (Sisgwenjazz 2016; Forbes Africa 2013; Gates 2015).

In her doctoral thesis, Sepuru (2019, 65-67) interviews and discusses ten present-day SA jazz pianists and gives insight to the various approaches taken by these musicians in grooming their pianistic style. This work gives understanding of the intricacies of what may be deemed contemporary SA jazz, which also aids towards identifying the parallels between 1960's US jazz and modern SA jazz cultural priorities. Sepuru's thesis gives an insider's view on the various aspects that shape individual SA pianisms. Pianists such as Andile Yenana and Sibusiso Mashiloane share that their cultural upbringing in the township shaped their musical influences. This is useful for my investigation in understanding South African jazz cultural aesthetics and how some

of those may coincide with modal jazz of the 1960s. Muller's *Why Jazz?: South Africa 2019*, also offers valuable interview snippets from past and present SA jazz artists such as Zim Ngqawana, Sibongile Khumalo, Kyle Shepherd and Vuma Levin that point toward further research on 21<sup>st</sup> century SA jazz (Muller 2019).

Benjamin Givan's analytical article, which includes a musical transcription of Tyner's solo over Coltrane's *Bessie's Blues*, provides an Afro-diasporic look into the interactions between the members of Coltrane's classic quartet, in relation to harmony, rhythm and overall engagement of the members within the ensemble. Givan renders the idea that Coltrane and Tyner's influence were perhaps not only vital through mere musical and cultural influence, rather that Coltrane's quartet style of playing was also rooted in West African music and dance, thereby making the quartet a point of attractiveness and resonance for jazz artists in (South) Africa (Givan 2007, 257-272). Givan's notion, which surmises that the Coltrane quartet can be paralleled with West African music and dance characteristics, juxtaposes the quartet's recording of *Bessie's Blues*<sup>8</sup> with West African music and dance ensembles. He does this by employing art historian Robert Farris Thompson's concept "apart playing". Givan explains that members in a West African ensemble may play or dance counter rhythms to each other while simultaneously interlocking those cross rhythms to form a unity. Givan argues that Coltrane's quartet can be viewed from the same vantage point, extending the concept to the way in which Elvin Jones employs polyrhythms over a basic swing and how Tyner utilises chord substitutions, moving "apart" from the tone centre and back; all this while the group maintains a strong sense of togetherness. The goal in this state of apartness is for the ensemble to maintain a state of "connectedness" (Givan 2007, 275). Givan's aim here, is to "establish a cultural context for the ways in which jazz musicians relate their improvisations"; this is a pertinent analysis given Coltrane's interaction with transnationalism in his music (Monson 1998, 157-163). Although cross rhythms and "outside playing" have been commonly employed by many other jazz musicians before and after Coltrane's popularity in the 1960s, the "apart playing" together with other musical aesthetics discussed later in this thesis make the quartet stand out. Musical traits such as vamps, ostinatos and the implementation of musical aesthetics from other

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<sup>8</sup> From the album *Crescent* (1964).

ethnic groups, made the quartet more attractive to South African musicians, particularly those whose musical background involves partaking in ritual performance that utilise these musical characteristics, thereby making Coltrane a stronger point of reference. Makhathini for example states that: “I came to understand my voice as a pianist through John Coltrane’s *A Love Supreme*” (Blue Note Records *n.d*). Similarly, in keeping with locating cultural contexts in jazz, Jackson (2000, 23-25) makes a case for the misplacement of jazz and the blues outside of its cultural meaning. He argues for jazz performance as a practice through which the organisation and response to the Black American experience can be illustrated. He further posits that because the blues is an integral part of the continuation of the Black American heritage, memory and identity, it becomes an aesthetic of Black music, not just musical technique, and should be treated as such (*ibid.*, 51-52). Washington (2022, 125-126) similarly suggests that jazz is a source through which communal negotiations can be approached during performance. Jackson (2000, 32) echoes this idea while discussing “jazz as ritual”, an idea Makhathini discusses in his doctoral thesis where he argues for improvisation in jazz as a tool that can be employed within ritual (the jazz performance stage) to access new knowledge from the spiritual realm, guided by his ancestors (Makhathini 2023, 67-68).

Similarly, De Villier’s thesis, explores the “sonic signatures” of topical SA artists, Kyle Shepherd, Bokani Dyer and Nduduzo Makhathini. De Villiers (2021, 3-7) explains “sonic signatures” as understanding how each artist constructs and articulates his music, both musically as well as through the discourses that surrounds his music (often relayed through album and song titles and stylistic approach). She reflects on how time and place<sup>9</sup> affects a player’s “sonic signature”. De Villiers, through musical analysis, interviews and by engaging with scholarly work, finds that Makhathini’s “sonic signature” borrows jazz as a medium through which the Zulu sounds of his upbringing (often modal and/or cyclical) along with traditional American and SA jazz forms merge together to create a unique musical synthesis. The overarching goal for Makhathini is

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<sup>9</sup> Place not only described at geographical location but also social interactions expressed through cultural, political and spiritual discourses amongst others.

the access of a divine space through jazz improvisation, and as a *sangoma*<sup>10</sup>, how *ubungoma*<sup>11</sup> can be understood in today's modern world and produce new knowledge.

In this thesis I hope to articulate the nuances within current SA jazz, especially pertaining to its cultural, spiritual and personal implications with respect to the situatedness of Coltrane's music within 1960s Black America. A large portion of my discussion is based on musical analysis. Of the artists whom I have chosen, there are no published transcriptions as of yet. All transcriptions in this paper are transcribed by the author and are used against Rinzier's summary of McCoy Tyner's harmony (Rinzler 1999), in order to argue how Tyner's minor- quartal- and modal-based harmonies facilitate a South African aesthetic, while also showcasing the extent to which his musical approach has impacted and perhaps resonates with the SA artists discussed.

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1 John Coltrane as a Seminal figure

John Coltrane (1926-1967) was an African American tenor saxophonist born in North Carolina (Porter 1998, 1). He is known for his impressive technique on his instrument: his blistering improvisations, thought-provoking compositions and his devotion to spiritual expression through music (Nevader 1982, 26). The distinctive sound he was able to achieve on his instrument shaped the sound of other tenor saxophone players in jazz, both in the US and abroad (Chasing Trane 2016, 44:36). Compared to his contemporaries like Dexter Gordon, Sonny Rollins, Stan Getz or Cannonball Adderly, his characteristic timbre and integration of spirituality into his music made him unique. His timbre, described as piercing, bright and "dry", was due to his preference for a metal mouthpiece, a soft to medium reed and tight embouchure. His playing is raspy and sharp, especially in his fast improvisations; though he was capable of creating a dark and lyrical sound when playing ballads<sup>12</sup> (Porter 1983, 56).

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<sup>10</sup> A traditional healer who, through, divination brings harmony to the lives of others, by relaying messages from ancestral spirits. This is also done through song.

<sup>11</sup> The practice of being a *sangoma*.

<sup>12</sup> See Coltrane's *Ballads* (1963) album.

Furthermore, what made Coltrane attract attention in the 1960s was his commanding use of the soprano saxophone, an instrument that was not common in jazz, especially at the time of recording the album *My Favorite Things* (1961), which brought him the most recognition. Coltrane became most prolific in the early 1960s during his time with his classic quartet: McCoy Tyner (piano), Jimmy Garrison/Steve Davis (double bass) and Elvin Jones (drums). Coltrane's group is primarily defined as playing music categorised as modal jazz, though they also played tunes<sup>13</sup> that were not within the modal jazz style. Jones' use of polyphonic rhythms and Tyner's expanded musical language of fourth voicings, in particular, gave the quartet its distinctive sound.

Coltrane has a prolonged influence on SA jazz players. From older generation players like saxophonist Winston "Mankunku" Ngozi and Bheki Mseleku. Mankunku, born in Cape Town in 1943, was known to have been influenced by Coltrane's pivotal sound on the tenor saxophone. Mankunku's tone on the saxophone has also inspired a newer generation of musicians in South Africa; saxophonist Sisonke Xonti mentions in an interview that Mankunku was the link for him to Coltrane, having spent a great deal of time studying and playing Mankunku's music, he would later discover John Coltrane's (S. Xonti, *Author Interview*, 27 July, 2022). Apparent influences of Coltrane's music in Mankunku's can be heard in his 1968 album *Yakhal' Inkomo*. One of the songs, *Dedication*, includes the subtitle: "To Daddy Trane and Brother Shorter", a clear tribute to Coltrane and saxophonist Wayne Shorter. On the same album Mankunku records his version of Coltrane's tune, *Bessie's Blues*.

Mseleku, on the other hand, was not only impacted by Coltrane musically (Lilley 2019, 34-35), but also shares Coltrane's relation of personal spirituality within jazz. After Coltrane had a spiritual awakening, he was led toward embracing a universalist approach within his spiritual life; embracing varied religions (Porter 1998, 211). His more famous album *A Love Supreme*, is a testament to Coltrane employing music as a means to engage with a sense of spirituality. The importance that Coltrane placed on

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<sup>13</sup> Examples are *Bessie's Blues*, *The Night Has a Thousand Eyes*, *Central Park West*, *Body and Soul* and the *Coltrane Plays the Blues* full album.

spirituality is evident in his interviews, liner notes<sup>14</sup> and song titles.<sup>15</sup> In an interview he states:

My goal is to live the truly religious life and express it in my music. If you live it, when you play there's no problem because the music is just a part of the whole thing...I'd like to point out the divine in a musical language that transcends words" (Porter 1998, 232).

Similarly, Mseleku's spiritual life was of great importance to him. He adopted a universalist understanding of the world, learning from the teachings of various religious leaders: Buddha (Buddhism), Krishna (Hindu), Guru Nanak (Sikhism), Mohammed (Islam) and Jesus (Christianity). Mseleku further states in an interview that music should be a daily experience, a ritual, revealing that there is a sense of purpose for him in jazz that goes beyond the sonic (South Bank Show 1994). One of the prominent features of Mseleku's music, is his affinity toward cycles within his compositions (Lilley 2020, 3-22). He had an interest in harmonic progressions that work their way through all 12 keys. For Mseleku, this facilitated a type of meditateness and continuousness of being, which he relates to as a way of healing himself and others (South Bank Show 1994). Cyclical forms<sup>16</sup> in the music of Mseleku can be heard in tunes like *Melancholy in Cologne*, *Cycles* and *Aja*. Mseleku employs harmonic axes such as a minor 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle, found in *Melancholy in Cologne*, that results in a 4-tone system of E-G-Bb-Db. Coltrane can be found using cycles such as the major 3<sup>rd</sup> axis in *Giant Steps*, and other cyclical systems evident in other tunes: *Satellite*, *Countdown* and *Central Park West*. Though Coltrane may not have stated a particular spiritual connection for his interest in cycles as Mseleku did, it is worthy to point out these parallel musical interests between the two artists.

In 1977, after Coltrane had passed on, his wife, Alice Coltrane—having seen Mseleku play at the Newport jazz festival with Philip Tabane—gave Mseleku John Coltrane's mouth piece that he had used on *A Love Supreme* (personal communication with Mseleku's friend Eugene Skeef). This was a big gesture of love and appreciation, having also watched her husband devote himself to his music and spiritual life; she must have seen something akin in Mseleku that she admired.

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<sup>14</sup> See *A Love Supreme* liner notes, Coltrane on Coltrane (Devito 2012, 225-228).

<sup>15</sup> *Om, Meditations, A Love Supreme, Crescent, Ascension*.

<sup>16</sup> See Lilley's explanation of Cycles in Mseleku's music (Lilley 2019, 3-22).

Tyner's influence on Mseleku—amongst the several American jazz players that shaped his style<sup>17</sup>— comes through in Tyner's modal approach (Lilley, 106-114), which can be heard in tunes such as *Celebration*<sup>18</sup> and *Meera Ma*<sup>19</sup>. Lastly, Mseleku references Tyner in his song, *Suluman Saud*, which is an alternate spelling of Tyner's Muslim name. I point out Mseleku's associations with Coltrane and Tyner as both the artists discussed later (Makhathini and Mkhize), are to some degree impacted by Mseleku's playing.

## 4.2 McCoy Tyner: A Historic Jazz Icon

Alfred McCoy Tyner (1938-2020) was a Black American jazz pianist from West Philadelphia, born to Beatrice and Jarvis Tyner Sr. Growing up in West Philadelphia, in a predominantly Black American neighbourhood, his upbringing was filled with a sense of community, love and respect (Klerkstra 2000, Merrell II 2013, 13-16). One of his first musical experiences was through his mother who was once a church organist (Merrell II, 2013, 27). Choosing to take piano lessons around the age of thirteen, various neighbours would open their homes for him to practice piano after school, prior to having his own piano at home (ibid., 2013, 35-36). Beatrice strongly supported the development of the skills of her children. She eventually bought Tyner a piano, which was situated inside her beauty shop, where he hosted jam sessions with his music peers (ibid., 29).

Bud Powell, a pioneer of the bebop jazz style (Yanow 2000, 61-62), was one of the first musicians to play on Tyner's piano. Powell became Tyner's informal teacher, and would leave a memorable imprint on him; Tyner states:

I had the pleasure of meeting and hanging out with Bud Powell. I was so young, but we used to follow him around and try to get him to play...I got Bud to come on and play it. I'll never forget that...He initiated my piano (Sidran 1995, 231).

Tyner's other influences are Thelonious Monk, Red Garland and Art Tatum (ibid., 40-45). McCoy Tyner is widely known for his modal, pentatonic and quartal harmonies.

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<sup>17</sup> See Lilley's chapter on Mseleku's jazz lineage through detailed explications of various jazz artists who shaped his music (Lilley 2020, 23-58).

<sup>18</sup> From the album *Celebration* (1992).

<sup>19</sup> From the album *Meditations* (1994).

However, in his early recordings as a side man, as well as in his early recordings as a leader between about 1962-1965<sup>20</sup>, we hear a strong footing within the bebop style in his melodic phrasing and harmonic sensibility. However, from the time spent playing with Coltrane, he began developing his musical voice based largely on minor and quartal harmony, the pentatonic scale, suspensions as well as modal scales.

### 4.3 Modal Jazz as a Potential Vehicle for Expressing the Spiritual and Cultural

Modal jazz is the style which Coltrane became most famous for during the height of his career in the early 1960s. Some of his works that are predominantly modal include *Africa/Brass* (1961), *My Favourite Things* (1962) and *A Love Supreme* (1965). Similarly, Tyner also recorded a number of modal jazz works such as *Effendi* (1962), *Reaching Fourth* (1962), *Inception* (1962) and *Passion Dance* (1967)<sup>21</sup>. Although both musicians recorded non-modal jazz tunes (albeit with their own modal/vamp arrangements of such songs),<sup>22</sup> they became synonymous with the modal jazz style.

Modal jazz is a predominant substyle of jazz that arose in the late 1950s and early 1960s. It is characterised by static harmony (which led to extended pedal points), ambiguity (suspended chords or fourth voicings), slow harmonic movement (one chord may last for 8, 16 or 32 bars), and makes use of modal scales. (Waters 2000, 53).

The contention of this section is to explore how modal jazz is able to facilitate a spiritual ground upon which the messages or meanings, intended (or unintended) by jazz players are easily expressed in such a musical environment. Furthermore, it delves into transnationalism<sup>23</sup> and why it became synonymous with modal jazz during the 1960s and how contemporary South African jazz musicians seem to be doing something similar. I do this by looking at Coltrane's modal music, his interest in transnationalism

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<sup>20</sup> See albums *Inception* (1962), *Reaching Fourth* (1963), *A Night of Ballads and Blues* (1963) and *Tyner Plays Ellington* (1965).

<sup>21</sup> *Effendi* and *Inception* are songs from the album *Inception*. *Reaching Fourth* is from the album *Reaching Fourth*. *Passion Dance* comes from the album *The Real McCoy* (1967).

<sup>22</sup> McCoy Tyner arranged many jazz standards in his own way, employing vamps or new basslines. Examples are *Wave*, *Speak Low* and *Stella by Starlight*; all include introductory vamp sections as well as unique basslines not present in the original compositions.

<sup>23</sup> The use of styles or musical aesthetics from external cultures or ethnicities.

through his explorations of musics from Africa, India and the Middle East, and explicating how this (especially his interest in Africa) may be one of the reasons he is an attractive figure to South African jazz musicians. This section does not answer these exploratory themes, rather it offers a perspective toward the understanding of the current sound and cultural positioning of South African jazz, by considering the works and/or ideologies of the chosen SA artists.

In dealing with contemporary SA jazz musical subtleties, I draw on Monson (1998, 150) who proffers an ethnomusicological view of modal jazz that is of interest to this paper. Monson states: “[O]pen tonal frameworks [modal jazz] served as a musical crossroads facilitating the incorporation of transnational (especially non- Western) approaches to improvisation, timbre and spirituality”. Coltrane’s classic quartet was prominent during the early 1960s. During this period in jazz, the use of non-Western musical approaches became common (ibid., 158)<sup>24</sup>. Alongside his band members, Coltrane studied and listened to music from Africa, India (especially the music of Ravi Shankar) and the Middle East (Monson 1998, 158; Porter 1998, 211). Pertinent to this paper is Coltrane’s interlinkage of the music from the African continent with modal jazz techniques, which may be one of the components that has ultimately made his music a particular source of inspiration for Makhathini.

Having studied the music of West African drummer Michael Babatunde Olatunji (Porter 1998, 212), Coltrane also listened to various African recordings in preparation for the recording of his album *Africa/Brass* (ibid., 213). The African records that he listened to are not specified (Monson 1998, 159), however, the musical aesthetics found in West African music often cover the musical aesthetics of sub-Saharan African musics: frequent use of cyclical forms, ostinatos used to build polyphonic interlocking parts in a musical environment, and a preference for denser textures (Turino 2003, 198 and 211); these are characteristics also found in a number of South African indigenous musics.

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<sup>24</sup> Late 1950s and 1960s releases indicate this: Randy Weston’s *Bantu Suite* (1958), *Uhuru Africa* (1960) and *Africa Rhythms* (1969). Drummer Max Roach’s *We Insist! (Freedom Now Suite)*, released in 1960, was a call for the cry of the oppression of people in the US as well as (South) Africa. The latter is evident in song titles like *All Africa* and *Tears for Johannesburg*. This attention toward the African continent continued in the 1970’s. McCoy Tyner’s album and song titles include: *Asante* (1970), *Sahara* (1972). Pharoah Sanders releases *Thembi*, in 1971. Thembi is an abbreviation of Zulu/Xhosa names: “Thembekile” Thembisa” “Nomathemba” and “Thembelihle”.

The aforementioned traits are present in how Coltrane approaches his own music. Porter (1998, 212) suggests that the time in which Coltrane spent studying Olatunji's recordings, potentially influenced his rhythms as well as other African structural concepts; particularly the use of ostinatos and vamps. Ostinatos and vamps can be heard in songs like *My Favourite Things* and *Greensleeves*<sup>25</sup> where both improvisation sections of these songs are primarily shaped around a two-chord vamp. In *Greensleeves* an ostinato can be heard in the bassline groove as well. Porter attributes the use of static vamps and cued sections to West African drumming groups that repeat one section of a song until the leader gives the cue to change. Vamps are a musical aesthetic that also came to shape Tyner's musical language (discussed in section 4.4) and is a musical characteristic that shows up in the music of Makhathini and Mkhize. Vamps are a musical trait that I can further parallel with various indigenous songs in the Xhosa culture, in particular bow music of the *uhadi*<sup>26</sup> and *umrhubhe*<sup>27</sup> which have a static harmonic form, often feeling like a vamp, due to the repetition of two major chords. In Xhosa ritual music, all songs I have encountered have short forms; they are often sung over long periods of time, accompanied by clapping and sometimes the drum. These songs will make use of two or three chords at most. Similarly, childhood songs I sang in the street, which essentially are an extension of traditional music sung by elders, were short, cyclical and often modal in harmony. The musical traits outlined above are also apparent in Zulu music. Hence an artist like Makhathini may venture more toward modal music characteristics in jazz that imply and facilitate a personal South African subtlety. A poignant point that Kelley makes regarding the increased usage of non-Western musical traits is that they do not always necessarily point to a need to assert an individual cultural reference per se. Rather, the greater and more progressive significance of the African and Black American collaborations is that artists were concerned with jazz's modernity, through imagination, pulling from ancient African, Eastern and other diasporic musics to create a new ideal (Kelley 2012, 1, 6 and 10). Washington (2022, 125) expresses a similar sentiment that jazz can be used as an imagery of freedom.

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<sup>25</sup> From the album *Africa/Brass*.

<sup>26</sup> A single string struck Xhosa mouth bow that uses a calabash as the resonator.

<sup>27</sup> A single string Xhosa mouth bow that uses the mouth as the resonator.

While Coltrane's transnational musical integration became apparent in his early 1960s modal tunes, his solos became significantly longer (Nisenson 1993, 116). This lends itself to modal jazz's ability to open musical space that creates an environment for musical exploration and expressiveness, without the limitation of chord changes. This non-limitation—due to prolonged static harmony—aids a sense of continuousness in the music, somewhat representative of the human spirit vis-à-vis a constant existential quest of the understanding and searching of oneself. Porter (1998, 211) points out that Coltrane's pursuit of "universalities in music" (his transnational integration in jazz) was a vehicle for him to understand his spiritual pursuance of finding universalities in various religions:

It wasn't only the sound of world music that attracted him; Coltrane was interested in all kinds of religion, and in all kinds of mysticism. He knew that in some folk cultures, music was held to have mystical powers, and he hoped to get in touch with some of those capacities.

The more Coltrane's spiritual search grew, the longer his solos became. Perhaps the time and space afforded in his modal compositions gave him room for such spiritual investigation?<sup>28</sup>

From my own insider's perspective, when I improvise over a tune that employs one chord extended over a long period, I typically find it easier to relay thought processes through phrases I have tirelessly worked through. This is fundamentally different to functional chord changes, where one is prone to thinking in a linear manner, that is, the outlining of harmonic contour through melodic phrasing. Modal jazz allows for this barrier to be broken, giving space for the player's personal musicality. This personal musicality for me often includes the usage of patterns and lines from Moses Molelekwa<sup>29</sup>, Mseleku and Tyner, as a means to utter a sense of identity within my own playing; to position myself as South African within my music. This is not done intentionally; it is by virtue of the preferred material that I practice. Modal jazz, within

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<sup>28</sup> See *My Favorite Things* live in Comblain-la-tour (1965):

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ehYM\\_cg2DHI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ehYM_cg2DHI).

<sup>29</sup> South African jazz pianist whose music is often categorized as "world music".

my musical praxis, enables this relaying of a personal identity or perspective on the band stand.

Although my musical adaptations and inspirations have no spiritual semblance per se, an artist like Makhathini (2023, 33-34) on the other hand asserts that he employs a concept “sonic citation”, which he explains as “the conscious use of musical materials of the ones who have passed” (the musical ancestors). This is done either through transcribed material or “sound strategies” that, from a ritual perspective (Makhathini treats his musical praxis as ritual), invokes but also appeases these spirits through sound.

Makhathini’s spiritual engagement through sound can be linked to the spiritual alternatives that were sought after by jazz musicians in the 1960s in the US. In 1960s Black America, jazz artists were in, what Steinmetz refers to as, spiritual “exile”. Steinmetz (2020, 422-427), while discussing post secularism in contemporary American jazz, notes the long history that jazz has had with Christianity, from the spirituals of the south, the blues and earlier jazz artists like Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington were to some degree employing sounds from the Christian church. However, as jazz moved into the 1950s, 1960s (and beyond), artists such as Coltrane, Pharoah Sanders and Sun Ra explored alternative methods of spirituality. A removal from the exclusivity of Christianity, and a coming into the knowledge of a “higher power”; this inspiration for spirituality came not necessarily from one specific religion but from the “artists personal philosophy” (ibid., 428).

These alternate spiritual/cultural ways of being, I argue are apparent in contemporary South Africa, more significantly, as they relate to post-apartheid and post-colonial South Africa. Makhathini is one of these artists who calls for the “checking out of Western epistemes” and an embrace of understanding South Africanness through a fundamental African cosmology.<sup>30</sup> In section 4.7, I expound on Makhathini’s ritual association within his jazz playing and improvisation, as a case of how modalities, transnationalism and spirituality are significant for his personal South African

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<sup>30</sup> According to Merriam Webster, cosmology refers to “a theory or doctrine describing the natural order of the universe” (Merriam-Webster, 2025).

experience in jazz. 4.7 also looks at how McCoy Tyner's modal, quartal and minor- based harmony facilitate this nuanced South African musical aesthetic, especially within a modal setting.

#### 4.4 McCoy Tyner's Musical Framework

Tyner's musical style is based on minor harmony, quartal chord voicings and pentatonic melodic phrasing. He developed this style during his tenure with the John Coltrane quartet, and thereafter recorded his own music as a leader, where his unique style matured (Merrell II 2013 ,93). Paul Rinzler (1999) describes the main musical principles that shape Tyner's unique jazz piano style; mainly based off of minor harmony, quartal voicings and modalities. He provides nomenclature for Tyner's fourth voicings which I will be using in the rest of this thesis. Due to Tyner's musical language largely being made up of quartal voicings, Rinzler suggests, a "Q" to signify a perfect 4th interval stacked chord. This will then be followed by its degree. For example, the chord showed in Figure 2, is a C-Quartal-7 chord labelled as CQ7. This indicates that there are perfect 4<sup>th</sup> intervals stacked up to the 7<sup>th</sup> degree from the root note. Whatever degree is on top, is the number that appears following the "Q" sign (ibid., 38-39). E.g., CQ10 would mean the top note is Eb, as shown below.

Figure 1: "CQ10"



Tyner's over-arching musical elements are namely: quartal harmony, the pentatonic scale, minor modes and mixolydian, the pervasiveness of the perfect fourth and fifth interval in certain aspects of his compositions and the use of suspended chords through inverted harmonies. Rinzler points out that Tyner treats quartal voicings as a consonance, rather than resolving them. Whereas in common practice harmony,<sup>31</sup> one of the notes in a quartal chord typically would be resolved to another (ibid., 39). Figure 2 shows an example of a quartal voicing that McCoy Tyner may use as a consonance for chord one.

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<sup>31</sup> Functional harmony, which is non-modal.

Figure 2: "CQ7"



In common practice jazz harmony, the quartal shown at Figure 2 could typically be used as a suspended chord 5; it would be expected to move to a dominant chord 5, before landing, perhaps back to chord one. However, Tyner treated quartal chords, such as in Figure 2, as a final resolving chord, allowing for the ambiguity of the chord quality to take preference with no intention of resolution. He also uses quartal voicings in his left hand as an accompaniment to his right-hand improvisations, as well as quartal harmony throughout his compositions (*ibid.*, 39).

Rinzler points out the overarching preference for minor harmony in Tyner's musical language, favouring the minor pentatonic over the major as well as minor modes. The Dorian and Aeolian modes are most frequently used, the Phrygian and Mixolydian modes less often (*ibid.*, 41-42). Consequently, Tyner's voicings are mostly derived from these modes. He shapes left hand fourth voicings by planing<sup>32</sup> them within a certain mode, sometimes adding one or two extra notes, especially the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> degree, within the minor pentatonic. Tyner also often makes use of the minor 6 pentatonic, which derives the "So What"<sup>33</sup> voicing, which he regularly employs in his playing and compositions. Figure 3 shows the common minor modes that Tyner utilised and how the quartal voicings are derived from these scales. Some notes of the scale are left out because a quartal is unable to be shaped due to the limitations for the occurrence of a parallel 4<sup>th</sup>, in such cases a major 3<sup>rd</sup> interval may arise.

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<sup>32</sup> Chords that move in an equidistant and parallel motion according to the notes belonging to a harmonic scale.

<sup>33</sup> Modal chord movement played by Bill Evans, on Miles Davis's *So What* composition.

Figure 3: Possible quartal voicings over pentatonic and McCoy Tyner's frequently used minor modes

Figure 3 displays two staves of musical notation in 4/4 time, illustrating quartal voicings for four different modes. The first staff shows the C MIN PENTATONIC mode (first four measures) and the C DORIAN mode (last four measures). The second staff shows the C AEOLIAN mode (first four measures) and the C MIN 6 PENTATONIC mode (last four measures). Each mode is represented by a sequence of four chords, with the notes of each chord written in a quartal arrangement.

#### 4.4.1. Left Hand Planing

For the planing in his left-hand accompaniment over minor tunes, he often favours quartal 7th chords built on the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> degrees<sup>34</sup> (see Figure 4). He sometimes uses the quartal on the 3<sup>rd</sup> degree (also the upper structure of a dominant 13<sup>th</sup> chord), which is often implemented to support minor 6 pentatonic ideas played by his right hand. Figure 5 shows Tyner's left hand in his tune *Inception*, and Coltrane's *Liberia*.

Figure 4 Left hand quartal voicings

Figure 4 shows a single staff of musical notation in 4/4 time, illustrating left hand quartal voicings for four chords: I, II, IV, and V. The chords are represented by quartal voicings in the bass clef, with the notes of each chord written in a quartal arrangement.

Figure 5: 1st bar, *Inception*, 2nd bar, *Liberia*.

Figure 5 shows a single staff of musical notation in 4/4 time, illustrating left hand quartal voicings for four chords: Cm<sup>6</sup>, G<sup>7alt</sup>, A<sup>7alt</sup>, and Dm<sup>6</sup>. The chords are represented by quartal voicings in the bass clef, with the notes of each chord written in a quartal arrangement.

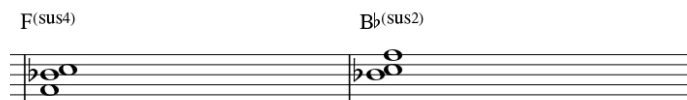
#### 4.4.2 Inverted Fourth Voicings

Tyner's unique style involves not only the parallel implementation of these quartal chords—as shown in Figure 2—but also inversions of them. In other words, using the CQ7, when the C is placed above, we get a F<sub>sus</sub>4 chord (Fig. 6); when inverted,

<sup>34</sup> Few examples where this can be heard: *Effendi* from album *Inception*, *Reaching Fourth* (*Reaching Fourth*), *Impressions* by John Coltrane (Ralph Gleason sessions). *Contemplation* (*The Real McCoy*), *Mr Syms* (*Coltrane Plays the Blues*) and *Afro Blue* (*McCoy Tyner plays Coltrane*).

placing the F as the top voice, we get a Bbsus2 chord, creating various suspended harmonic textures with the same CQ7 chord.

Figure 6: Inverted fourth chord



These inversions are usually articulated in his right hand, while the left hand plays quartal chords in accompaniment, shown in Figure 7. These types of shapes are heard in Tyner's comping<sup>35</sup> on Coltrane's *A Love Supreme* album. Figure 7 also illustrates Tyner's harmonic voicing of the melody of *Afro Blue*<sup>36</sup> using these suspended inversions.

Figure 7: "A Love Supreme" and "Afro Blue" excerpt

#### 4.4.3 "Pairs of Chords"

Another musical idiosyncrasy found in Tyner's harmonic approach is what Rinzler terms, "pairs of chords" (ibid., 63-69). Tyner's usage of "pairs of chords" are often (but not always) found in a vamp-like musical context; a hallmark heard across

<sup>35</sup> Short for accompaniment. Used to describe a jazz pianist's rhythmic placement of chords behind a soloist or within a band.

<sup>36</sup> From *McCoy Tyner Plays Coltrane: Live at the Village Vanguard* (2001).

several of his own compositions, as well as Coltrane's, including *My Favourite Things* and *Greensleeves*, which both have "pairs of chords" employed in the vamp section. In Tyner's music, this usage of "pairs of chords" is identifiable across his music. In *Peresina*<sup>37</sup>, we see a pair of chords in an open vamp introduction of Gsus4 and Fsus4 over an F pedal point.

Figure 8: *Peresina*

Another example is shown in Tyner's version of jazz standard *Speak Low*<sup>38</sup>; he uses a Csus4 chord in place of the Gmin-C7 of the original tune (Fig. 9). Here he pairs two *So What* voicings (a chord voicing marked by Rinzler as frequently used chords in Tyner's harmonic language (see Rinzler's table of played and possible chords of McCoy Tyner (ibid., 48-49)).

Figure 9: "Speak Low"

#### 4.4.4 Basslines, Dyads and the Perfect 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Intervals

Other than the perfect 4<sup>th</sup> interval, the perfect 5<sup>th</sup> is also prominent in Tyner's musical expression. He often uses open 5<sup>th</sup> dyads<sup>39</sup> in his left hand during his improvised solos. In the key of C, that would be C and G played simultaneously (as shown in Figure 10). These bass dyads are habitually and often percussively placed on the first beat of a

<sup>37</sup> From album *Supertrios* (1977).

<sup>38</sup> From the album *Inception*.

<sup>39</sup> A two-note interval played at the same time.

bar, before Tyner launches into an extensive solo or comping, or when playing “outside”.<sup>40</sup> For the latter, the bass dyad would be used to re-establish the tonal centre.

Figure 10: McCoy Tyner dyads in *Peresina* 0:26-0:32mins

Bass dyads are a distinctive mark in McCoy Tyner’s music<sup>41</sup>. The perfect 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> are permeating intervals throughout Tyner’s repertoire. Rinzler, points out that this is also due to the fact that, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> intervals are synonymous with the pentatonic scale, upon which Tyner’s musical language is largely based. These intervals naturally occur within the scale (Rinzler 1999, 40). The 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> intervals are also prevalent in how he shapes his basslines. Figure 11, 12 and 13 show some of Tyner’s basslines, where 5<sup>th</sup> intervals occur.

Figure 11: “Speak Low”

Figure 13: "Wave"



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The ubiquitous scales in Tyner's quartal harmony, which also extend to melodic material, are the minor pentatonic, Aeolian and Dorian modes. Merrell II (2013, 98-147) also finds that other melodic content present in Tyner's playing include, repetitive melodic riffs, four-note cell groupings as well as call-and-response techniques.

The table below illustrates the summation of harmonic and melodic features that make up McCoy Tyner's minor based, fourth voicing style.

Harmonic Content	Melodic Content
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <u>Perfect 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> intervals</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Found in bassline construction and bass dyads.</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. <u>Quartal Harmony</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Left hand accompaniment usually uses fourth voicings derived from minor modes.</li> </ul> </li> <li>3. <u>Inverted Harmony/Suspended Chords</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Fourth voicings that are inverted to create other textures, resulting in suspended harmony.</li> </ul> </li> <li>4. <u>"So What" Chord voicing</u></li> <li>5. <u>Quartal harmony also used in conjunction with common-practice harmony</u> such as II-V-I</li> <li>6. <u>Pairs of Chords</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Not necessarily in single pairs, but also sets of more than two chords.</li> </ul> </li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <u>Pentatonic Scale (especially minor pentatonic)</u></li> <li>2. <u>Modes (especially Dorian and Aeolian)</u></li> <li>3. <u>Major pentatonic</u></li> <li>4. <u>Four Note cell groupings</u></li> <li>5. <u>Repetitive melodic motifs</u></li> <li>6. <u>Call and Response Techniques</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Especially the conversation between his left and right hand.</li> </ul> </li> </ol>

This table will be used in the following sections, to correspond the music of Mkhize and Makhathini in light of Tyner's style.

As with most jazz musicians, Tyner also makes use of tertian harmony (Rinzler 1999, 69). It is pertinent to point out that his fundamental understanding of harmony is based on traditional jazz (swing, bebop etc), from as early as stride piano playing,<sup>42</sup> of which Art Tatum was an indirect influence (Merrell II 2013, 40). However, for the subjects analysed in this paper, the most pervasive features evident in Tyner's style are his melodic pentatonic phrasing and the quartal harmonic sound. This includes the usage of quartal harmonies, pentatonic melodic phrasing and the perfect 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> intervals (often heard in bass dyads and basslines) as demonstrated.

In analysing musical contributions from SA jazz artists who have come before me, it is evident that Tyner's voice in jazz aids in an African, moreover, a South African sensibility within jazz. Makhathini states:

[I]f you are listening to McCoy Tyner from the continent...in Africa and you never heard jazz before in your life, you might probably think it's some of the folk music we play here...that's really how a lot of us gravitate towards him...there is just like, a natural kind of leaning to African folk sounds...that just gives us a beautiful kind of context to come into this music (Blue Notes Records 2020).

In the next section, I would like to present musical analyses of pianists Afrika Mkhize and Nduduzo Makhathini that highlight Tyner's significance.

#### **4.5 Afrika Mkhize: A Poignant Contributor to Contemporary South African Jazz**

*"Afrika Mkhize represents the exciting new face of South African jazz. Steeped in South Africa's musical heritage, he displays a fresh, international perspective that places South African jazz in a new perspective" Alan Webster (cited in Hdsentertainment n.d).*

Afrika Mkhize is a South African jazz pianist born in Durban (artSMart 2012). He was introduced to piano playing at the age of six years old. He studied classical piano at the age of 11 at the Funda Centre Music School in Soweto and later enrolled at the National School of Arts in Johannesburg at the age of 15. Mkhize's fascination with jazz

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<sup>42</sup> Tyner heard Art Tatum play at a concert while he (Tyner) was in his formative jazz years. Tyner can be heard playing stride over *Have you met Ms Jones* at the Newport Jazz festival 1998 (Jazz on MV 2014).

was strengthened when he studied jazz, composition and arrangement at Pretoria Technikon in 1999.

He has worked with legendary musical names, one such was Miriam Makeba, for whom he had been musical director and pianist. Other important figures in the South African music industry include Hugh Masekela, Dorothy Masuku, Zim Ngqawana and Sibongile Khumalo, amongst others. He has worked as a musical director, producer, arranger and sideman for various artists, and has released music under his own name (Hdsentertainment n.d). He is also the pianist for the topical jazz group Bänz Oester and the Rainmakers lead by Swiss bassist Bänz Oester (Ansell 2023). In 2012 he was awarded the Standard Bank Young Artist award. Other prominent contributions include Mkhize's big band arrangements of South African jazz pianist Bheki Mseleku, in an effort to keep Mseleku's legacy alive and make his music accessible to educational institutions and the public domain (SABC News, 2015). For Mkhize, Mseleku was a musical hero, whom he wanted to sound like after hearing him for the first time around the age of eleven (ibid.). Mkhize's pianism shows a versatile pianistic language that ranges from gospel, blues, modal and modern jazz which are all encapsulated within his personal South African musical style.

#### **4.6 Musical Analyses**

In the following analyses I examine the musical vocabulary of Tyner as heard within the compositions and solos of Afrika Mkhize and Nduduzo Makhathini. In doing so, I intend to display the extent to which Tyner has been impactful musically in shaping Mkhize and Makhathini's jazz contributions and therefore the current "new SA jazz sound". As such, this thesis not only seeks to explore the grounds on which contemporary SA jazz players resonate with Coltrane and Tyner from a cultural and/or spiritual sense, but also the extent to which Tyner has been influential, musically. Through analysing harmonic, melodic and compositional techniques, I make a case for the impact of McCoy Tyner as one of the prominent American jazz figures to impact some modern SA jazz artists.

Tyner's influence may be as a result of direct listening or transcribing done by these artists within their praxis; however, it is also possible that these "Tynerisms" were acquired through secondary learning and transcribing i.e., by listening to other jazz artists. Through prior personal communication with Mkhize, I understand that some of his favourite jazz pianists, besides Bheki Mseleku, include Herbie Hancock and Kenny Kirkland. Both Kirkland and Mseleku are artists who, to varying degrees, show some sort of stylistic influence from Tyner, from whom Mkhize may have derived his own musical distinction from. As I make a musical case for Tyner's overall musical impact on the discussed SA artists, I also hope to showcase the new and varying synthesis that contemporary SA jazz artists are forming and popularising today, by highlighting one of the impactful American artists, McCoy Tyner.

#### **4.6.1 Musical aspects in "South Coast"**

In the following analysis of Afrika Mkhize's solo on *South Coast*, Tyner's musical idiosyncrasies are apparent, namely, the overarching sound of minor modes and the minor pentatonic (heard in the head and in Mkhize's improvisation), planing of fourth voicings in the left hand, the solo section centred around "a pair of chords", 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> intervals in the accompanying bassline, and to a lesser degree, bass dyads and the usage of the *So What* voicing.

*South Coast* is a modal composition from Mkhize's 2015 album, *Raindancer*, written in C minor Dorian. The form is centred around an ostinato, formed by two "pairs of chords". The first pair is C minor 7, with its relative major chord Eb69. The secondary pair is B major 7 and Eb minor 7; these constitute the A section. The B section is harmonically more elaborate, contrasting the A section.

Figure 14: "South Coast" lead sheet

## SOUTH COAST

**(A)** |1,2,3,4

C<sub>m</sub>7 Eb<sup>9</sup> C<sub>m</sub>7 Eb<sup>9</sup>

B<sup>major</sup>7 Eb<sup>7</sup> B<sup>major</sup>7 Eb<sup>7</sup>

B<sup>major</sup>7 Eb<sup>7</sup> B<sup>major</sup>7 Eb<sup>7</sup>

C<sub>m</sub>7 Eb<sup>9</sup> C<sub>m</sub>7 Eb<sup>9</sup>

C<sub>m</sub>7 Eb<sup>9</sup> C<sub>m</sub>7 Eb<sup>9</sup>

C<sub>m</sub>7 Eb<sup>9</sup> C<sub>m</sub>7 Eb<sup>9</sup> |1,2,3,4

**(B)**

B<sup>major</sup>7 Eb<sup>7</sup> D<sup>major</sup>7 F<sup>#m</sup>7 F G/F ∞

G/F F ∞

B<sup>major</sup>7 Eb<sup>7</sup> B<sup>major</sup>7 Eb<sup>7</sup> C<sub>m</sub>7 Eb<sup>9</sup> C<sub>m</sub>7 Eb<sup>9</sup>

The song starts with a bassline that utilises notes from C minor pentatonic. Intervals within the minor pentatonic naturally yield 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> intervals. Fourth and fifth intervals are highly characteristic of Tyner's playing, and, as demonstrated in 4.4,

can be found utilised in his basslines. We see the implementation of these intervals in *South Coast's* bassline.

Figure 15: "South Coast" bassline



As the saxophone enters with the melody, we hear that the melody is completely based on the C minor pentatonic, accompanied by the primary chord pair, Cminor7-Eb69.

Figure 16: Melody

Written in an ABA format, the solo form employs the primary pair, Cminor7-Eb69 in an open vamp style (A), and the secondary pair, Bmajor7-Ebminor69 on cue (B), thereafter it returns to A.

#### 4.6.2 An Analysis of Mkhize's Solo

An analysis of the full solo played by Mkhize reveals application of the Dorian mode and the minor pentatonic in conjunction with the minor 6 pentatonic scale over the primary pair of chords. These are implemented through melodic phrasing and left-hand planing of fourth voicings. He also utilises non-diatonic triads, chromaticism and the whole-tone scale. As previously elucidated in section 4.4, Tyner planes fourth

voicings at various degrees within a particular mode. Throughout his solo, Mkhize is heard employing the same technique, utilising quartal voicings on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> degrees of C minor Dorian (see fig. 17 and appendices for full transcription). The left-hand planing is an accompaniment to a right hand that frequently makes use of the minor pentatonic (as shown at fig.17). The minor pentatonic is not only favoured by Tyner, as marked by Rinzler (1999, 40), but is also a scale prominent in African music (Kirby 1930, 406).

Figure 17: Mkhize left hand planing

Figure 18 shows other planed quartal voicings less frequently used by Mkhize. These are the quartals on the 5<sup>th</sup> degree (used nine times throughout the solo) and the quartal on the 6<sup>th</sup> degree (used once), as shown below at bars 6 and 10 and bars 24-27.

Figure 18 Other planed quartal voicings

Bass dyads are one of the musical aesthetics that trademark Tyner’s playing (Rinzler 1999, 58-62). A left- hand bass dyad of C and G is heard once at bar 11 (fig. 19), before Mkhize launches his right hand into triadic phrasing.

Figure 19: Bass dyad and “So What” voicing

Mkhize makes reference to one of the pertinent chord voicings subsequent to fourth voicings, that permeate Tyner’s harmonic language: the *So What* voicing (see table of Tyner’s over-arching harmony at section 4.4). At bar 10 Mkhize uses the quartal voicing on the 4<sup>th</sup> degree with a major 3<sup>rd</sup> interval between the second and third voice, as per the *So What* voicing. Mkhize though, does not move down a whole step as the *So What* voicing does. However, the melody delineates the sound of the voicing shape. He instead planes the quartal a whole tone higher (indicated in brackets in bar 10 at Figure 19). Other harmonic and melodic musical traits that feature in Mkhize’s solo are: the use of chromaticism (bar 9-8 and 16), the whole tone scale (bar 18-20), triad shapes (bar 11-12).

#### 4.6.3 Summary of melodic and harmonic content in “South Coast”

*South Coast* highlights Mkhize making use of classic modal jazz concepts, including the usage of interchangeable modes (employing C Dorian and minor 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> pentatonic scales), a shorter improvisation form (“pairs of chords”) and ambiguous

harmony (expressed as quartal harmony). Mkhize's left hand is largely configured by planed parallel fourth voicings, from the C Dorian mode, especially on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> degrees; less often, he uses fourth voicings that exist on the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> degree as well as traditional rootless jazz left-hand voicings.

The general conclusion is that there are apparent harmonic and melodic materials from Afrika Mkhize's solo on *South Coast*, that assume close ties with the melodic and harmonic traits used by Tyner. Mkhize may have used this musical approach specifically because of the modal nature of the composition; in other words, Tyner's musical approach may have fit the style of the tune closely. Lastly, the title of the tune, *South Coast*, suggests a reference to KwaZulu-Natal also known as the South Coast, where the majority of the Zulu nation reside and where Mkhize is from. The title suggests a remembrance or celebration of Mkhize's people and place of birth. In this case, Tyner's musical language seems suitable to utter this subtlety. This reinforces the ability of Tyner's musical language to accommodate a South African identity in jazz.

Not only in *South Coast* does Mkhize employ the discussed musical techniques, but in various parts of his playing, whether the composition is modal or not; particularly in building tension during comping for a soloist or within his own solos. Examples include his comping over the saxophone solo in *Ambiguous* (2:53-3:05; 3:13-3:26 and 3:41-4:00mins), a tune from Bänz Oester & the Rainmakers album *Playing at the Birds Eye*. In *The Rainmakers*<sup>43</sup>, during his solo (3:54-4:00; 4:20-4:28) he employs modal quartals in and out of the key<sup>44</sup>. It is very possible that Mkhize derived some of these harmonic devices from Mseleku whom he admires. Lilley (2019, 106-114) points out this type of modal planing of the left hand as a feature that Mseleku used through listening and applying some of McCoy Tyner's harmonic and melodic style.

#### 4.7 Nduduzo Makhathini

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<sup>43</sup> From the album *Playing at the Birds Eye*.

<sup>44</sup> Also see his solo with The Blue Notes Tribute Orchestra (4:36- 7:25). Recording is available at South African History Online website. <https://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/remembering-blue-notes-south-africas-first-generation-free-jazz-gwen-ansell-11-september>.

#### **4.7.2 Makhathini as a Cultural and Musical Contributor to South African Jazz**

Nduduzo Makhathini is a South African jazz pianist and scholar from KwaZulu-Natal. He is another salient contributor to the current musical sound of South African jazz and academia. Having recently received his doctorate from Stellenbosch University, Makhathini's music and studies mostly deal with African cosmology and spirituality in jazz (Makhathini 2020; Ackerman 2018). Makhathini is a Blue Note Records signed jazz artist and has a total of 10 albums. He is also a musical producer, having produced albums for South African artists such as jazz bassist Herbie Tsoaeli, jazz drummer Tumi Mogorosi and vocalist Thandiswa Mazwai (Blue Note Records *n.d.*).

Makhathini's work is as much concerned about the music as it is about the conversations that relate to current culture, heritage and personal African identity in the modern world. In her interview after his album release, *In the Spirit of Ntu*, Sepuru (2022) describes him as a musician whose sound is rooted in Zulu culture and internationalism at the same time.

Makhathini's South African influences include Bheki Mseleku, Moses Molelekwa and Abdullah Ibrahim (Blue Note Records *n.d.*). Internationally, his jazz influences include Thelonious Monk, Sonny Clark, McCoy Tyner (personal communication), Andrew Hill, Randy Weston and Don Pullen (Blue Note Records *n.d.*). He cites Coltrane's classic quartet and Tyner as artists who helped him understand his voice and account for his identity in his piano playing:

I came to understand my voice as a pianist through John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme*...As someone who started to play jazz very late, I had always been looking for a kind of playing that could mirror or evoke the way my people danced, sung (sic) and spoke. Tyner provided that and still does in meaningful ways (ibid.).

The effect of Tyner is evident in Makhathini's choice of voicings, compositional style and improvisational approach. Coltrane's resonance is most clearly seen in the way in which Coltrane closely emphasised his spiritual ties within his music. Makhathini's music is grounded upon its ritual use. As a practicing healer, his improvisations are a metaphorical place for his spiritual work. He correlates his practice as a *sangoma* with improvisation on the band stand. Where a *sangoma* physically throws bones in order to

tap into the metaphysical realm with the ancestors, Makhathini uses the metaphor “throwing of bones” on the piano with improvisational exploration, as a means to attain new knowledge and bring it forward to the physical world (Makhathini 2021).

#### **4.7.2 Makhathini’s Ritual Engagement Within Jazz**

In his doctoral thesis, *Breaking into Sound: Dis/Locating Ntu Cosmology and Improvisation in South African Jazz*, Makhathini centres “ntu” cosmology as the governing principle that can be used to understand how South African musicians approach improvisation in jazz. *Ntu* is described as a “vital force”, that encompasses all dimensions of the universe according to Bantu-speaking cultures; an African cosmology that governs how people relate to themselves, others, living creatures and the spiritual dimension. He contends that by analysing South African jazz outside of a Western ontology and epistemology, we can reveal intrinsic ways of being for the African (especially in music), in a manner that is perhaps close to how Africans related to music and other dimensions prior to coloniality (Makhathini 2023, 4).

Makhathini asserts that continuity and wholeness are the two main concepts through which “ntu” cosmology is expressed. Continuity is explained as the living, being inextricably connected to the living dead (ancestors), as well as the “not-yet-born” (ibid., 52). Wholeness, on the other hand states that African individuals should primarily be viewed as part of a greater whole; this includes humans, living things, God and the ancestors: “The wholeness of being acknowledges a coexistence between the physical and metaphysical dimensions” (ibid., 54-55). The premise of “ntu” cosmology purports that an African individual cannot be whole or complete without the active engagement of his/her ancestors, community and higher force and that all conventions of life, as well as the understanding of ones being as an African is derived from this understanding. Furthermore, Makhathini states that ritual is the passageway to keep this continuity and wholeness intact; due to the living receiving guidance, protection and other salient messages for themselves and their families in the present world. Thus, it is imperative for them to partake in ritual interventions for the harmony between the seen and unseen world (ibid., 58).

As a result, Makhathini, in his own practice, uses the stage as a place for ritual. He situates his improvisation through this spiritual paradigm, tapping into the unknown through musical extemporisation during solos, surrendering to this higher force. This surrendering, Makhathini asserts, is a “field of discovery” or an “unfolding of revelations”, a place where, after such surrendering, one returns from this “ritual state”<sup>45</sup> with new knowledge (ibid., 67-68).

Improvisation is the mode that facilitates Makhathini’s praxis to the divine realm. Musically, his works are substantially based on modal musical environments. Makhathini states that “meditativeness in music<sup>46</sup> allows the borders between the physical and spiritual realm to collapse” through “multiple invitations of the whole and essence towards a mode of guide-ness<sup>47</sup>” (ibid., 73). In other words, the meditative sounds in modal music (perhaps because there is less distraction or busy chord changes), create an easier environment for accessing liminal spaces in the music, achieving the goal of “ntu”, which is working toward “wholeness” and “continuity”.

To sum up, Makhathini views music as a means to understand the physical and spiritual dimensions that make a person whole within an African cosmological perspective. Furthermore, as a *sangoma* he uses music as a continuation of his healing and divination work. It is apparent that he draws from McCoy Tyner’s modal, quartal and minor- based harmony to facilitate a nuanced South African musical approach within a modal setting. Evaluating examples from mainly *Lift Those Voices*, I would like to highlight the harmonic parallels between his harmonic choices and compositional techniques through Tyner’s musical framework outlined in 4.4.

*Lift Those Voices* is from Makhathini’s 2016 album, *Inner Dimensions*, which features the *Umgidi* Trio and the One Voice Vocal Ensemble. In the following analysis, we find the following idiosyncrasies related to Tyner’s minor- and quartal-based harmony: quartal and suspended harmony, bass dyads, planed left-hand quartal voicings and interchanged minor modes.

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<sup>45</sup> Makhathini describes this liminal state as: “to be here and elsewhere simultaneously” (2023, 68).

<sup>46</sup> Understood as a constant and consistent state of being, musically expressed through static, and consistent harmony such as in modal jazz.

<sup>47</sup> A liminal space during ritual, where the individual surrenders to that which is being surrendered to.

*Lift Those Voices* is in the key of D minor Aeolian with the A section employing a repeated 4-chord progression. Starting on D sus, it moves to F7(add4), then Gsus4 and Asus9; followed by the B section.

Figure 20: "Lift Those Voices" lead sheet

**LIFT THOSE VOICES**

(A)

D(sus9) F7 G(sus4) A(sus9) D(sus9) F7 G(sus4) Em7/A

5 (B) C13(sus4) A(sus4)

9 F G A C D Em9

Detailed description: The figure shows a lead sheet for the song 'Lift Those Voices'. It consists of three systems of musical notation. The first system, labeled (A), is in 4/4 time and contains eight measures of whole notes with the following chord symbols: D(sus9), F7, G(sus4), A(sus9), D(sus9), F7, G(sus4), and Em7/A. The second system, labeled (B), starts at measure 5 and contains four measures of whole notes with the chord symbols C13(sus4) and A(sus4). The third system starts at measure 9 and contains four measures of whole notes with the chord symbols F, G, A, C, D, and Em9.

The harmonic progression is first introduced by Makhathini on piano, employing quartal harmony in how he voices the dominant chords (fig. 21). The voices come in thereafter with a melody shaped around D Aeolian, with some notes harmonised as fourths (fig. 23). We also hear bass dyads accompanying the melody (fig. 24).

Figure 21: Piano intro

Detailed description: The figure shows the piano introduction for 'Lift Those Voices'. It is written in 4/4 time and consists of two systems of musical notation. The first system contains four measures. The right hand plays a melody of quarter notes: D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4. The left hand plays a bass line of quarter notes: D3, G2, F2, E2, D2, C2, B1, A1, G1, F1, E1, D1. The second system starts at measure 5 and contains four measures. The right hand plays a melody of quarter notes: D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, A4, G4, F4, E4, D4. The left hand plays a bass line of quarter notes: D3, G2, F2, E2, D2, C2, B1, A1, G1, F1, E1, D1.

A finer look into the voicings played in the piano introduction (fig. 21), reveal that quartal stacks are used as a basis for his dominant chords: FQ7 for F7 (add4), GQ7 for Gsus4 and an AQ7 chord for Asus9 (fig. 22).

Figure 22: Intro quartal voicings

Figure 23: Melody

Figure 24: Bass dyads

During his solo (1:59-4:03mins), Makhathini utilises various planed left-hand quartal voicings derived from D Aeolian. In the first chorus of his solo, his sparse left hand, upon its entry employs a DQ7; the first degree of the D Aeolian mode, as well as the quartal on the 4<sup>th</sup> degree. For the F7 chord, we see a jazz rootless left-hand voicing, Fsus13 built from the 3<sup>rd</sup>, we also hear him utilising the quartal on the 5<sup>th</sup> degree (of D Aeolian) for Asus9. In the second chorus he applies AQ7 for chord 1, Dsus4.

Figure 25: Quartal voicings used in solo section

Chorus three builds in intensity and sees Makhathini utilising fourth voicings outside of D Aeolian. He starts the chorus by using a G13 chord in his left hand for the first time, now implying a Dorian sound. He then further breaks away from D Aeolian, making use of fourth voicings in whole-tone and semitone movements. Makhathini also utilises A triad and Bb triad in second inversion.

#### 4.7.3 **Summary**

Makhathini's *Lift Those Voices* is written in one of the modes noted by Rinzler as the most common for Tyner. Makhathini's primary source of harmonic usage, especially in the left hand, are planed fourth voicings; he utilises bass dyads in his soloing as well as within the composition. Quartal harmony, not only shapes the bulk of his left-hand harmony but is also employed by the harmonies in the vocal melody. Modes are used to derive the harmony in the left hand, mainly Aeolian, but Dorian is hinted at, by the use of the G13 chord, which would be the quartal chord on the 3<sup>rd</sup> degree of D Dorian. Lastly, the tune is made up by mainly suspended dominant chords, the type of ambiguity present in McCoy Tyner's quartal sound (Rinzler 1999, 83).

Other harmonic features mentioned by Rinzler that are not found in *Lift Those Voices* are detectable across the range of Makhathini's music, for instance, in his comping on *Supreme Light* (1:12- 1:40 mins).<sup>48</sup> The solo section is in C Dorian. It is evident that his comping material uses elements of Tyner's inverted fourth voicing style (fig. 26). This style of voicing is akin to the voicing style Tyner uses throughout Coltrane's *A Love Supreme* album, based upon the inversions of parallel stacked fourth voicings whilst mostly maintaining planed quartals in the left hand. He also references the So What voicings (see bar 4, 13 and 14).<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> From his album *Listening to the Ground* (2015).

<sup>49</sup> These "So What" voicings can also be heard in "Waltz for Trane" on his album *Listening to the Ground*.

Figure 26: Makhathini inverted fourth voicings and “So What” voicings.

#### 4.7.4 Conclusion

Throughout Makhathini’s repertoire, there is a consistent preference for modal jazz<sup>50</sup> techniques. Quartal harmony in the left hand as well as inverted fourth voicings shape his comping and improvisational style. His proclivity toward the minor pentatonic scale and minor modes are seen in his compositional and playing styles. Suspended harmony in the chord progression of *Lift Your Voices* create an ambiguity and openness that possibly facilitates Makhathini’s exploration within the liminal space through which he continues his *sangoma* work on stage (or ritual place). There is a prevalence of 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> intervals in the harmonisation of the vocal melody of *Lift Those Voices* and in the usage of bass dyads. The tune entitled *Tyner’s Visit*, from the album *Mathunda Ya Kwanza, Vol. 1*, further establishes his kinship toward McCoy Tyner; similarly with the song “Waltz for Trane”<sup>51</sup> which indicates a tribute to the tenor saxophonist.

### 4.8 My Cultural and Musical Background

<sup>50</sup> Other song examples are *Same Mother* and *Tyner’s Visit* (from *Matunda Ya Kwanza, Vol. 1*).

<sup>51</sup> From *Listening to the Ground*.

As a newer generation of South African jazz musicians, I would like to present how Tyner's playing is relevant in the facilitation of recounting a South African identity in my own compositions. Tyner's approach is not my only influence, but rather, compared to other American jazz musicians, his gravitation toward African musical aesthetics makes him a strong point of departure for my venturing into the jazz realm. As a millennial born in 1995 immediately after SA became a democracy, I, at one point, felt the effects apartheid had left, particularly feeling marginalised or "othered" although my parents always reminded me that I could achieve anything in this new democracy. Growing up in the early 2000s in the townships of Cape Town, I clearly saw apartheid's residue in the city. I was born in one of Cape Town's oldest townships, Gugulethu, where I spent 12 years of my childhood, thereafter I lived in Khayelitsha. Gugulethu was one of the townships to which families were moved from various areas, due to the apartheid's forced removals. My paternal family were moved from Simonstown in 1965. My maternal grandparents, on the other hand, moved from the Eastern Cape to Gugulethu in prospects of work on their own accord. As children we were always informed of our history and the politics of South Africa, which shaped my understanding of being Black in South Africa. Our Xhosa culture was also something our parents were very proud of, and they ensured that we never felt ashamed of it especially amidst still feeling marginalised as Black people at the time. My story and the music I create reflect this understanding.

Growing up in a Xhosa home, our culture was imbued in various tangible ways: language, community, cultural ceremonies/rituals/traditions and music, all of which work together. The musical aspect was heavily ingrained in traditional customs and ritual. These may include, *umoluko*<sup>52</sup>, *umbulelo*<sup>53</sup> and *imbheleko*<sup>54</sup>. They are all vocal songs, which are accompanied with clapping and sometimes the drum (or any object that can produce a drum timbre). Songs are applicable to whatever the purpose of the custom; if a man was arriving from the bush, we sang celebration songs, *amagwijo*, sonically marking his arrival. Xhosa songs range from two-chord songs, a whole-tone apart often replicating the bow songs of *uhadi*, to songs that employed subdominant to

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<sup>52</sup> A man's initiation into manhood, which involves him leaving home and going to the bush for some time, to get circumcised and learn information pertaining to manhood, from his elders.

<sup>53</sup> Ritual for thanksgiving to the ancestors.

<sup>54</sup> A ritual that is performed for a child, in order that their path be straight in life.

dominant chord movements that resolve to perfect cadences. The songs are always led by a single voice, *umhlabeli*,<sup>55</sup> before other voices join in harmony. Overlapping melodies are sometimes sung by other voices in a heterophonic manner. The song forms, especially songs for rituals, are short and repetitive, making time for dancing. Mostly they have existing lyrics, however, extemporised lyrics are typical.

In the Xhosa community, and the black South African community at large, the impact of the church is prevalent. The hymns of the black Methodist church have strong harmonic ties with European music practices, such as the use of perfect and plagal cadences as well as the adapting of existing European hymns to include Xhosa lyrics and rhythms. Other traits in South African vocal music are antiphonal singing, polyphonic parallelism<sup>56</sup> and the usage of the pentatonic scale (Kirby 1930, 407-409).

As a result of my musical background, these characteristics, which are also found in most sub-Saharan African musics (Nettl et.al. 1992, 195-198), formed the basis of my understanding of music. Although I have formal classical training in piano, my point of departure in my artistic compositions seeks to tell a story of my personal identity; something most jazz musicians seek to do in their music.

The music of Tyner and Coltrane resonate most for me, as the aforementioned musical characteristics I grew up with can be pinpointed in their music. This, along with Coltrane's devotion to spirituality—also a familiarity due to my upbringing where music coincided with ritual events—solicited a natural gravitation toward their music.

#### **4.8.1 A note on my compositional approach**

Since the release of my double disc album in 2020, *Intyatyambo*, of which *Intyatyambo Pt. 2*, focusses on South African jazz, I have, without any real intention, employed the same method in most of my compositions. Almost all my compositions start off as melodies that I harmonise at the piano. The melodies sometimes emerge during sleep, or at random moments. I use a recording device to capture the melody so that I can return to it at a later stage. My melodies are never premeditated, planned or

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<sup>55</sup> Someone who initiates a song.

<sup>56</sup> The simultaneous harmonization of parallel intervals.

mapped out to follow any harmonical sequence intentionally. They just appear as they are; often they sound like melodies reminiscent of music I grew up with, whether from within my home or community. When adding harmony to the melody, I establish a key centre and harmonise according to the direction I think is best for the integrity of the melody. Basslines and groove are relatively easy to establish once melody and harmony are in place.

#### 4.8.2 **“Echoes of Gugulethu”: A Musical Analysis**

With the release of my sophomore album entitled *God Bless iKapa. God Bless Mzantsi*. The album is a tribute to the community that has raised me: Cape Town and South Africa. It is also a prayer that God keep us, His people, under His protection.

Musically, *Echoes of Gugulethu* highlights my experience growing up in the township and includes sounds that can be recognised as particularly South African, such as short and cyclical forms, fewer chord progressions, and the use of the pentatonic scale. The song is in 4/4-time and in the key of F minor Dorian. With the exception of the prelude, being in F Aeolian. The melody is shaped around the F minor pentatonic scale (fig. 27). The groove can be described as a quasi-African style fused with an “Elvin Jones 6/8” feel.

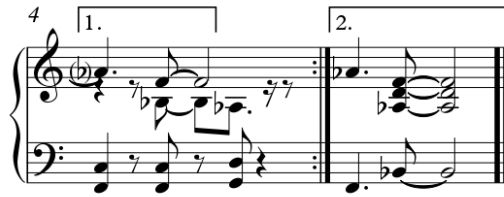
Figure 27: F minor pentatonic



The song starts with a prelude, centred around two chords: the relative major Ab6 and F minor 7. The melody of the Prelude employs a descending F minor pentatonic scale (fig. 28). The entire melody is harmonised using inverted fourth voicings (fig. 28). The voicings are inspired by Tyner’s style used in Coltrane’s *A Love Supreme* recording.

Figure 28: Prelude

Prelude



Tyner’s harmonising technique for this melody captures the essence of the pentatonic movement of the melody. Since 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> intervals are easily derived from the pentatonic scale, the most suitable approach for harmonising would be to employ quartal harmony, especially inversions of fourth voices. This allowed for the melody to be harmonised in various ways without sounding monotonous or stagnant. Furthermore, the presence of 4<sup>th</sup> qualities also captures the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> interval harmonies used to harmonise South African vocal music (Kirby 1930, 407)—a quality that I wanted to encapsulate, especially the singing I heard during rituals. Quartal harmony also has a wandering sound that gives the music a nostalgic feeling. Since this is a tribute song, I wanted it to create a nostalgic mood; quartal and modal harmonisation facilitate this.

The use of bass dyads in the left hand (as seen in fig. 28) add a percussiveness and heaviness that is reminiscent of the drum. Although there is a groove carrying the song (the drum kit), the open 5<sup>th</sup> interval played on the piano adds a heavy timbre, similar to the drum used in Xhosa rituals. The usage of bass dyads aids in this expression, which suits the style of this song.

The A section is harmonically centred around a “pair of chords”— Fmin-Bb7, and occasionally Fmin-Bbmin7, as well as a melody that is configured by F minor 6 pentatonic (fig. 29). This is accompanied by an ostinato in the bassline, throughout the A section (see fig. 30).

Figure 29: “Echoes of Gugulethu” melody

Figure 30: Bassline

The bass line was inspired by Tyner’s use of basslines in tunes like *Peresina*, *Contemplation* or *Effendi* (highlighted in 4.4). Following this, the B and C sections occur.

The solo section follows in an ABA form and uses the “pair of chords” in a vamp-like style; these are Fmin-Bb7 and Fmin-Bbmin7 occurring in a repeated 8-bar cycle. After which, a cued B section occurs, with a final A section that takes us back to the chord pair vamp (see Figure 31).

Due to the solo section being a vamp with limited harmonic movement—largely centred around F minor as the overarching key centre—as well as a driving drum groove, there is room for the soloist to be flexible with melodic phrasing and rhythmic placement and/or sub-divisions, the latter, being a feature that can only truly be explored in real time performance. Nonetheless, the preference for subdivisions is favoured for this song; the simplicity of the form and harmonic arrangement gives space for this kind of rhythmic interplay from the drummer as well as interaction between musicians (Monson 1999, 158).

Figure 31: Solo form

Solo- Open

39 F<sup>7</sup> B<sup>b7</sup> / F<sup>7</sup> B<sup>b7</sup> F<sup>7</sup> B<sup>b7</sup> On Cue G<sup>m11</sup> F/A B<sup>b7</sup> E<sup>b7</sup>

45 F/A F<sup>m</sup>/A<sup>b</sup> B<sup>b7</sup> E<sup>b7</sup> F<sup>m</sup> B<sup>b7</sup> / F<sup>m</sup> B<sup>b7</sup> C<sup>7</sup>alt.

#### 4.8.3 Conclusion

The way in which the music for my tune *Echoes of Gugulethu* has been arranged harmonically highlights musical characteristics pertinent to my identity, experience and upbringing as a South African. These are: the significance of the drum (expressed through bass dyads), a short, vamp solo form (articulated as a “pair of chords”), the use of the pentatonic scale and 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> intervals, as well as the facilitation of an exploration of counter rhythms through use of shorter harmonic progressions. The use of a “pair of chords” in the solo sections also recalls the bow music of the *uhadi*, which informs the musical structure of various ritual songs from my upbringing.

As a jazz musician, the ways in which my personal South African musical aesthetics were articulated in *Echoes of Gugulethu*, were through the inspiration of Tyner’s harmonic and melodic traits. The utilisation of quartal harmony, which best supports the pentatonic melody of the song, bass dyads that add a timbre imitating the drum, short forms which recount the nature of Xhosa song forms and the modal environment aiding the possibility for the exploration of polyrhythms, assisted in developing a song that is situated within a nuanced South African musical interpretation, through imagined musical characterisation. In other words, with the assistance of Tyner’s minor- and quartal-based harmony, I gave each Xhosa musical trait i.e. the drum, harmonisation style and the song form a reimagined jazz arrangement by implementing some of his musical idiosyncrasies for a jazz ensemble.

## 5. Conclusion

This thesis sought to pinpoint the cultural and spiritual relevance of Coltrane, especially considering the modal jazz context during the 1960s in the US, as well as the extent of the musical impact of McCoy Tyner's harmonic and melodic language in facilitating a South African utterance in jazz. The evidence of Tyner's influence on both Mkhize and Makhathini is perceivable from the musical aspect; both artists employ musical elements found in Tyner's harmonic and melodic musical expression. These are the quartal harmonies found in the planing of the left hand, the use of the minor pentatonic scale, the use of 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> intervals through bass dyads, the implementation of suspended harmony, pairs of chords and vamps.

It is distinguishable from the analyses that Mkhize, in *South Coast*, implements some of Tyner's musical language possibly because it serves the nature of the modal song. Tyner's approach perhaps facilitated a personal subtlety in the way he wanted to present the song, in that, it needed to communicate some sort of a South African distinction. This is relayed through the use of the pentatonic scale (a pertinent scale in African music), the use of "a pair of chords", which echoes indigenous and cyclical short forms and the song title *South Coast*, making reference to KwaZulu-Natal. Though in other recordings we may hear an implementation of Tyner's fourth voicing style during solos or within comping, Mkhize mostly uses Tyner's language in context: where the musical environment calls for it, i.e., modal compositions.

Makhathini, on the other hand, has a more consistent trend in the synthesised usage of Tyner's musical aesthetics, along with other musical citations in the formulation of his own musical praxis. As Makhathini stated, Tyner was a musical icon who assisted him in understanding his own voice in jazz (Blue Note Records, n.d.). From both pianists' musical angles however, the summation is that the way Tyner approached the piano, aids toward a uniquely South African musical narrative that both these Zulu jazz artists draw from. The cultural implication of Tyner's quartal and modal music approach is a basis (Blue Note Records 2023)<sup>57</sup> from which new South African

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<sup>57</sup> Interview by Don Was (president of Blue Notes Records) with Nduduzo Makhathini on what McCoy Tyner means for him. [https://youtu.be/hWx30gQXc\\_c?si=q2HQ5uTNA4gRhYPx](https://youtu.be/hWx30gQXc_c?si=q2HQ5uTNA4gRhYPx).

utterances can be explored. For these artists, perhaps it aids toward a growing synthesis (along with other personal influences) of what could be labelled as the “contemporary South African jazz sound”; one that is relevant to its practitioners and the audience of 21<sup>st</sup> century South Africa.

As a younger practicing South African jazz musician, my perspective is that Tyner and Coltrane have been influential by echoing a sound that allows for Africans to freely and openly speak their voice within a jazz context. They also highlight that jazz and some African musical aesthetics and cultural themes are not mutually exclusive, but are bound to each other. For the SA artists analysed in this project, there are musical and/or cultural and spiritual connections with Coltrane and Tyner. There are parallel themes articulated in this paper (spirituality and connections in cultural musical aesthetics) that are significant for the artists discussed here. There is no doubt that Mkhize and Makhathini looked to Tyner for musical inspiration, but more detailed considerations show a closer relationship that is tied to their personal African heritage, which links to musical preference as well as revealing continuities in Tyner’s musical idiosyncrasies that point to sub-Saharan musical aesthetics.

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## Appendices

Appendix A: Full transcription of South Coast by Afrika Mkhize.

Appendix B: *Echoes of Gugulethu* piano part.

# South Coast

Piano

Open A Cm Eb%

3

6

8

10

12

The musical score is written for piano in 4/4 time. It consists of six systems of two staves each (treble and bass clef). The key signature is C minor, indicated by two flats (Bb and Eb). The score includes various musical notations such as chords, melodic lines, and articulation marks. Above the first system, the chords 'Open A', 'Cm', and 'Eb%' are indicated. Measure numbers 3, 6, 8, 10, and 12 are placed at the beginning of their respective systems. The piece concludes with a double bar line at the end of the sixth system.

V.S.

2

Piano

14

Musical notation for measures 14-15. Measure 14 features a treble clef with a quarter rest followed by eighth notes, and a bass clef with a half note chord. Measure 15 features a treble clef with a sixteenth-note triplet and a quarter note, and a bass clef with a half note chord.

16

Musical notation for measures 16-17. Measure 16 features a treble clef with a sixteenth-note triplet and a quarter note, and a bass clef with a half note chord. Measure 17 features a treble clef with a sixteenth-note triplet and a quarter note, and a bass clef with a half note chord.

18

slightly out of time

Musical notation for measures 18-19. Measure 18 features a treble clef with a sixteenth-note triplet and a quarter note, and a bass clef with a half note chord. Measure 19 features a treble clef with a sixteenth-note triplet and a quarter note, and a bass clef with a half note chord.

20

Musical notation for measures 20-21. Measure 20 features a treble clef with a sixteenth-note triplet and a quarter note, and a bass clef with a half note chord. Measure 21 features a treble clef with a sixteenth-note triplet and a quarter note, and a bass clef with a half note chord.

22

Ped.

Musical notation for measures 22-23. Measure 22 features a treble clef with a sixteenth-note triplet and a quarter note, and a bass clef with a half note chord. Measure 23 features a treble clef with a sixteenth-note triplet and a quarter note, and a bass clef with a half note chord.

24

Musical notation for measures 24-25. Measure 24 features a treble clef with a sixteenth-note triplet and a quarter note, and a bass clef with a half note chord. Measure 25 features a treble clef with a sixteenth-note triplet and a quarter note, and a bass clef with a half note chord.

Piano

3

B section on cue

26

Musical notation for measures 26-28. Measure 26 features a treble clef with a melodic line of eighth notes and a bass clef with a steady accompaniment of chords. Measure 27 continues the melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 28 concludes with a final chord and a fermata.

29

Musical notation for measures 29-30. Measure 29 shows a treble clef with a melodic line and a bass clef with a steady accompaniment. Measure 30 continues the melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes.

31

Musical notation for measures 31-33. Measure 31 features a treble clef with a melodic line and a bass clef with a steady accompaniment. Measure 32 continues the melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 33 concludes with a final chord and a fermata.

34

Musical notation for measures 34-35. Measure 34 features a treble clef with a melodic line and a bass clef with a steady accompaniment. Measure 35 continues the melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes.

36

Musical notation for measures 36-37. Measure 36 features a treble clef with a melodic line and a bass clef with a steady accompaniment. Measure 37 continues the melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes.

38

Musical notation for measures 38-39. Measure 38 features a treble clef with a melodic line and a bass clef with a steady accompaniment. Measure 39 continues the melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes.

V.S.

4

Piano

40

42

44

47

## Echoes of Gugulethu

### Prelude

Musical notation for the first system of the Prelude, measures 1-3. The piece is in 4/4 time and B-flat major. The right hand features a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, while the left hand provides a steady bass accompaniment with quarter notes.

Musical notation for the second system of the Prelude, measures 4-8. Measure 4 includes a first ending bracket and a second ending bracket. A box labeled 'A' contains the text 'Bass and l.h piano only'. The right hand continues its melodic pattern, and the left hand maintains the bass accompaniment.

Musical notation for the third system of the Prelude, measures 9-12. Measure 9 begins with a triplet of eighth notes. Chord symbols 'Fm' and 'Bb7' are placed above the staff. The right hand features a melodic line with triplets and slurs, while the left hand has a bass line with triplets.

Musical notation for the fourth system of the Prelude, measures 13-16. Measure 13 begins with a triplet of eighth notes. Chord symbols 'Fm' and 'Bb7' are placed above the staff. The right hand features a melodic line with triplets and slurs, while the left hand has a bass line with triplets.

Musical notation for the fifth system of the Prelude, measures 17-20. Measure 17 begins with a triplet of eighth notes. Chord symbols 'Fm' and 'Bbm' are placed above the staff. The right hand features a melodic line with triplets and slurs, while the left hand has a bass line with triplets.

Musical notation for the sixth system of the Prelude, measures 21-24. Measure 21 begins with a triplet of eighth notes. Chord symbols 'Fm7' and 'Bb7' are placed above the staff. The right hand features a melodic line with triplets and slurs, while the left hand has a bass line with triplets.

2 B

25 Fm Bb7 Gm11 F/A Bbm7 Eb7 F/A Fm/Ab

29 Bbm7 Eb7 Gm11 F/A Bbm7 Eb7 F/A Fm/Ab

33 1. Bbm7 Eb7 2. Bbm7 Eb7 C

36

Solo- Open On Cue

39 F7 Bb7 F7 Bbm7 F7 Bb7 Gm11 F/A Bbm7 Eb7

45 F/A Fm/Ab Bbm7 Eb7 Fm Bb7 Fm Bb7 C7alt.