

**South African Jazz in Frame:**  
**A creative research project exploring South African jazz**  
**through photography**

by

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A minor creative project submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Music.

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# Declaration

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# Abstract

The aim of this creative research project was to investigate and document the closely connected relationships between South African jazz musicians and South African jazz photographers through their contributions such as the images, videos and the stories behind each of the respective art forms. The research looks at the specific contributions selected photographers have made to the South African jazz genre, in documenting the process and the art. The intent was to explore the creative process of seeing South African jazz documented in imagery, and through sound and music. This project also sought to unpack the artistic and creative approaches used by the selected photographers, and investigated their relationship with the music.

The project explores the idea of telling stories through both respective art forms, through image and sound, and reflecting this through a curated performance and exhibition. Qualitative research methods were used to inform the creative process. The research process was conducted in two parts: semi-structured interviews with three selected South African jazz photographers, followed by a concert performance combined with an exhibition of selected photographs by the three jazz photographers, and some of my own work.

By uniting a visual exhibition and a live performance presenting South African jazz music, I aimed to create an intimate and captivating experience. Through the live performance, the project aimed to explore how sound and image relate, furthermore, this project has shed light on the complexities of capturing live jazz performances, and how the photographs have documented and celebrated the richness and diversity of South African jazz.

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# The project video and some notes for the viewer

The video of the Creative project, *South African Jazz In Frame* can be found by clicking this link:

[https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1AREAyukEYgti71zYhTjn94w8wrjDj0\\_n?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1AREAyukEYgti71zYhTjn94w8wrjDj0_n?usp=sharing)

The video is a large file, so it is best viewed after downloading it, rather than attempting to view it online in Google Drive.

This written explication accompanies the video of the project, and it is intended that it be read after viewing the video.

# Introduction

Over the years, photographers have documented the creativity of South Africa's jazz musicians, preserving moments in time that would have otherwise gone unnoticed. By capturing their struggles and successes, these photographers have given viewers a glimpse into the vibrant, ever-evolving culture of jazz in South Africa. Through the images they produce, photographers have created a portal to another time, and a glimpse of how the art of jazz has evolved over the years. These images offer a visual record of this creative art form as a reflection of the history of South Africa, its diversity and people, and how music has been influenced by its environment. By viewing these photos, it is possible to better understand the unique style and energy that South African musicians have brought to this genre of music. In a recent article in the Sunday Times by journalist Tymon Smith, he explains the great role photographers have played in documenting the South African aural history. These musicians would not have been seen or documented if it were not for photographers capturing their creativity and their musical journey (Smith, 2021).

This research project aims to investigate and document the closely connected relationships between South African Jazz musicians and selected South African Jazz photographers. The project examines the contributions of these jazz photographers in bringing forward the music and artists through their images. I explore the idea of telling stories through both respective art forms, through image and sound, and reflecting this through a curated performance and exhibition. I used qualitative research methods to inform the creative process. The research process was conducted in two parts: semi-structured interviews with three selected South African jazz photographers, followed by a concert performance combined with an exhibition of selected photographs by the three jazz photographers, and some of my own work.

By uniting a visual exhibition and a live performance presenting South African jazz music, I aimed to create an intimate and captivating experience.

## Inspiration

The inspiration behind this project stemmed from many conversations with my late uncle, world-renowned photographer and activist, George Hallet. Hallet was an advocate for South African jazz and shared a deep love for this genre of music, and views on music photography. He shared many unseen and popular images he had taken over the years, almost two hundred images. Unfortunately, he passed away in July 2020 leaving behind an accumulation of images with no archive. Whilst sorting through all of his negatives and prints in his dark room, I realised the importance of the story behind each of the images. The photographs are not just a physical form of nostalgia, but also a narrative of a time gone past. The images are a time capsule that tells the story of the South African jazz scene through a lens. Through my uncle's photography, I was able to dig deeper into the history behind jazz music, connecting more with its culture and heritage. This was an emotional journey for me, and it prompted my interest in telling South African jazz stories through both photography and music. This project aims to bring South African jazz images to the fore, so that more people can gain insight into the work of South African jazz photographers, but more importantly for audiences to experience the connection between the jazz image and the music.

## **Focal Research Question**

The focal research question for this project was to investigate and document the closely connected relationships between South African jazz musicians and South African jazz photographers through their contributions in the form of images, videos, performance and the stories told by each of the respective art forms. The project aims to examine the specific contributions of selected photographers to the South African jazz industry, it also seeks to connect the jazz image with the music of the depicted artist through the medium of a live performance.

The project delves into the creative process of curating a visual exhibition in tandem with curating a jazz performance, using the image as inspiration for the selection of the repertoire to be performed. Through this project, I aim to explore the connection between South African Jazz as experienced by selected photographers, and the artistry of the South African jazz musician. In the process of creating the event, this research unpacks the artistic and creative approaches used by photographers interviewed. Furthermore, this project aims to shed light on the complexities of capturing live jazz performances, their impact on photography. Through the combined live performance and exhibition, the project interrogates how the photographs have documented and celebrated the richness and diversity of South African jazz.

## **Rationale**

The aim of this creative research project was to present a documented piece of work reflecting and acknowledging the definitive contributions made to South African jazz through the lens of the jazz photographer, using the medium of live performance. South African jazz has played a pivotal role in the country's history, particularly in the fight against the apartheid regime (Devroop and Walton, 2007). The jazz photographer has contributed to this important genre by bringing the images of the jazz performers and their art to a wider audience through books, newspapers and magazines.

A further aim was also to bring recognition to South African Jazz photography as an art form, and to bring into focus its important contribution to South African jazz. As a working student jazz musician and a freelancer jazz photographer, I have developed a great deal of respect and admiration towards jazz photographers of the past and present. Being closely connected to both worlds, I found myself in a unique position to bring together both perspectives.

As part of both the photographers' and jazz musicians' communities, I came across a general lack of awareness of the role that the photographer has played in the area of creative arts. Many photographers are only known by a small percentage of the music industry, which leaves gaps in the history of South African Jazz music. The goal of this project was to document the untold stories of South African jazz musicians through photographers' images, by presenting a project which showed elements of storytelling using visuals together with an accompanying live musical performance.

# Literature Review

## South African Jazz Photography

Jazz photography in South Africa has contributed to the greater dialogue of the music through every image captured. The images offer a glimpse of moments of the true artistry of the world of jazz. South African photographers have played a pivotal role in documenting the struggle through colonial and racial injustices as well cultivating the rich cultural history of the South African people (Devroop and Walton, 2007). However there seems to be a lack of academic research and archive findings documenting the work of South African jazz photographers, or relating to their images and experiences in their careers (Zimmer, 2012).

In my search for literature to support my creative project, I noticed there are very few academic articles or resources available focussing on South African jazz photographers and their contributions. The few available articles touching on this area mention the lack of research on the subject and how it shows the absence of acknowledgement of the importance of the image in telling the story of South African jazz.

Acclaimed apartheid struggle photographer, Rafs Mayet calls attention to the need for an archive of South African jazz photographs, and decries the lack of available literature, especially photography books. Mayet goes on to say that photographers active during the apartheid years would often include images of musicians in their coverage of struggle events. He explains that: "Culture and music were important components such occasions" and that photographers would often have "an insider's view" (Mayet, 2020).

In his introduction to a collection of essays centred on South African Jazz texts and discourse, Ramanna (2016, p. 23) describes how "jazz culture's visual texts can be rich repositories of social, historical, and emotional meaning." He also mentions the lack of research focussing on the visual aspects that are such an integral part of the South African jazz landscape: "To date, very little research has focused on album covers, posters, fashions; in short, the visual-textual practices that constitute South African jazz culture" (Ramanna, 2016). In Ansell's essay in the aforementioned collection, she argues that the work of journalists and photographers is largely responsible for the documentation of South African jazz during apartheid, as opposed to the work of researchers and scholars. (Ansell, 2016)

Although there is a need for further research and writing on this subject, I was able to source some written materials available, which mention South African jazz photography and culture. A prominent name that kept reoccurring throughout my search for academic writings or findings was that of the largely unknown, yet significant photographer, Basil Breakey. His works in the 1950s, during the Apartheid era, aimed to produce a narrative of hope and resilience through his images, most of which were unpublished. This lack of publication became a common theme, as I noticed that many of the photographs taken by South African photographers during the Apartheid era were rarely seen. A study by Niklas Zimmer in 2012 gives great insight to the life and contributions of Breakey. In addition to his photography, Breakey was also involved in the art and music community, something that became quite evident in his creative works (Zimmer, 2012). His photography captured the essence of South African jazz performance and its impact on culture. Breakey had the opportunity to photograph influential figures such as Hugh Masekela, Winston Mankunku Ngozi, and Abdullah Ibrahim in the late

1950s and early 1960s. His works were as deeply personal as they were well composed and full of sentiment. By presenting these works to the public, Breakey provided an invaluable resource for future research of South African Jazz photography, yet he is quite unknown, even in jazz circles (Zimmer, 2012). His work in capturing some of South Africa's leading jazz musicians in the 1950s, '60s and '70s was ground-breaking in its unique way of looking at jazz, and the culture that surrounded it. I was particularly drawn to Breakey's documentary style, which captured the essence of the era and the people involved. His photographic works feature in one of the very few books on South African Jazz and photography, *Beyond the blues: Township jazz in the '60s and '70s* (Breakey et al., 1997).

Zimmer's research was also a valuable source for information on how South African jazz music and photography played such significant role in the country's history, and reflects on the gap in our visual history:

South African jazz photography, both as a particular instance of visual history and as a local site for an international photographic genre is largely under-researched. In consequence, its iconic trajectory, with its interconnected sets of specific historical and cultural contexts, is still inaccessible to a larger viewership (Zimmer, 2012)

### **Preservation of works**

Although there is evidence of a lack of documentation and research into the jazz photography art form, there has been some progress on archiving the works of individuals who have been significantly involved in South African jazz. One of the most recent examples of this is the custodianship of photographic works by activist and well-known South African jazz photojournalist, Rashid Lombard. Lombard handed over his personal collection of images and videos to the University of the Western Cape to preserve the archive for future generations. This donation allows for very much needed access for academics and future scholars to conduct further research. Much of the material was gathered during the apartheid years and is directly connected to the struggle against apartheid. Lombard explains the importance of this in an article in the *New Frame*: "It's why it's so important to do this now with me, before I pass on. Let's face it, you're gonna pass on at some time. So the urgency is now." (Khan, 2022b).

In addition to the collection of his own photographic work, Lombard is also the custodian of a collection of works by renowned photographer, George Hallett. Lombard has emphasised the importance of digitising the photographs, for future researchers. His collaboration with the University of the Western Cape (UWC) has ensured that the team established as part of the planned photography centre at the UWC will work on the systematic digitisation and preservation of the vast collection of works. He has also envisioned that this preservation will continue with the works of other important South African photographers (Khan, 2022b).

There has recently been progress in hosting exhibitions of the work of South African jazz photographers. One such success story is the exhibition of work by Sipiwe Mhlambi, one of South Africa's most well known jazz photographers. The exhibition, entitled "Expressions", was launched at Fotoza in Rosebank in late September of 2020 (Mohlomi, 2020). The exhibition was praised for the subtlety and complexity of the works, as well as its emotional range, which is something only a master could achieve. The exhibition showcased the range of emotions and moods that jazz can evoke. It was a powerful reminder of how significant jazz is in South African culture.

The Fotoza Gallery's blog described the work as "a reminder, if any was needed, that jazz is rooted in an art form that promotes the values of equality, respect, and dignity", and states that the portraits

“reflect the promise and possibility of transcendence that characterized South Africa’s transition to democracy” (Fotoza, 2022).

Writing about the exhibition in the New Frame, Mohlomi states:

More than an exhibition of a body of work made mostly on film, Expressions stands as a monument to an era in South African jazz photographic history where patience could bring more rewards than speed. Subjects were co-creators and moments were portals into real and imagined worlds (Mohlomi, 2020).

Mhlambi has gone on to gain international recognition for his work and is now considered one of South Africa’s leading jazz photographers (Fotoza, 2022). He has created a unique vision of capturing the spirit of jazz’s iconic performers, which has been met with both critical acclaim and high praise from both musicians and photographers. Mhlambi is certainly pushing the boundaries of modern jazz photography in South Africa.

Alongside photographic exhibitions and the archive, South African jazz photography has also been preserved in several photography books and jazz texts including important images by South African jazz photographers have been published. The legendary photographer, and Mhlambi’s mentor (Khan, 2022a), Ndumiso Mike Mzileni was a well known news photographer, who was also passionate about capturing jazz performers (Ansell, 2022). Mzileni’s images are featured in Z.B. Molefe’s tribute to South African jazz women, *A Common Hunger To Sing* (Molefe and Mzileni, 1997), and in 2008 a book, entitled *All That Jazz*, a collection of his jazz photographs, was published by Highbury Safika Media (Mzileni et al., 2008). The same publisher released a book of jazz photography by Rashid Lombard in 2010, *Jazz Rocks*, which was edited by acclaimed photographer, George Hallett. David B. Copland’s book, *Last Night at the Bassline: A Tribute* tells the story of the legendary Johannesburg jazz club, The Bassline, alongside iconic images by several jazz photographers, including Siphwe Mhlambi, Lindo Mbhele, Munu Vilakazi, Tseliso Monaheng, Gregory Franz and Oscar Gutierrez (Mayet, 2020).

Most recently, the photographs of Rafs Mayet and Tina Smith appear in one of the first sheet music collections of South African jazz compositions, *The South African Jazz Collection*, allowing jazz aficionados the opportunity to view the images of the artists, while reading the notated versions of their compositions (Miller, 2021).

### **Challenges in preservation of the South African jazz image**

Although the a fore mentioned initiatives – the preservation at the University of the Western Cape of Lombard’s collection, Mhlambi’s exhibition, and the publication of the jazz photography books – are moves toward the preservation and celebration of South African jazz culture, there are still obstacles stand in the way of introducing more exhibition and archival work. The sheer volume of work needed to digitise a collection is a barrier, as this requires person hours and equipment. From my own experience in mounting an exhibition, I now realize the amount of work and the enormous costs that are involved in pursuing such a project. These costs include things like venue hire, printing of posters, flyers and other materials, as well as any additional security needed for the event. The printing expenses involved in producing high quality exhibition-ready prints are prohibitive to most photographers, not mention the cost involved in framing these prints. Added to this the necessary cost of publicising the event, in order to attract viewers and possible buyers for the work. Sourcing private sponsorships is time consuming, hard work, and depending on the size of the event, sponsorship alone may not be enough to cover all the costs. With the tight economic situation in South Africa, many will

not be able to fund their own exhibitions and will need support from government or other stakeholders.

Khan states, in this regard:

Very little care and funding has been channelled into restoring and preserving the heritage of photography in South Africa. There is also a lack of accessible digitising equipment. The work of important Black photographers has not been archived properly, the same applies for more obscure photographers, hence pieces of history seen through their eyes are missing (Khan, 2022b).

This is why the introduction of grants and sponsorships for those wanting to create their own exhibitions or archival work is a necessary step in the right direction.

Another obstacle is the lack of awareness of the work that exists in the archives and how they can be used to celebrate our musical heritage. The need for education to raise awareness of the archival material that exists is essential to ensure its preservation. Without this awareness it is unlikely that the material will reach a wider audience.

As a young, South African jazz musician and photographer, I feel that it is my obligation to pay homage to our elders in both art forms. This research project and performance aim to bring wider scholastic attention to South African jazz photographers, and the work of the musicians they capture. The project is an exploration of these two creative avenues, and aims to reflect the complexities of South African jazz culture. The project further seeks to unpack the relationship between South African jazz and photography, by exploring how they intersect, inform, inspire and connect with each other.

# Methodology

This research project aimed to explore the connections between the jazz image and the jazz performance, and to highlight the extensive contribution of jazz photographers to the art form of jazz, combining a photographic exhibition and a live performance.

Qualitative research methods, which included interviews and observation, were used to inform the creative process. The research process was conducted in several stages: After reviewing existing literature for supporting writing on my topic, I conducted semi-structured recorded interviews, and one written interview, with three selected South African jazz photographers. The photographers were selected for their varying viewpoints and stylistic approaches. Next, in collaboration with the hosting gallery, I curated a collection of images selected from each photographer, including some of my own work, for exhibition in the gallery space. Third, I selected repertoire based on the images chosen, and put together a live concert performance reflective of the background research, interview material and inspired by the images chosen. The final part of the Research project was the post-production process. This involved editing of the raw footage of the performance, mixing of the audio, and insertion of interview footage, and the creative inclusion of the images that inspired the music.

This project required many different elements in order for it to be presented therefore the methodology chapter of this explication includes detail on the full creative process. It would include descriptions of each element of the creative process, from insights from the interviews, curating images, the music selection, choice of hosting venue and a reflection on how I was required to navigate the roles of artist, event organizer, band leader, producer and director of the project, in addition to the role of researcher.

An important part of the creative process was to document both the performance and the makings of the project. A number of processes were documented, which contributed to the final output. These included interviewing the photographers, curating the images, creating the photographic exhibition, the corresponding selection of the repertoire for the performance, the rehearsal process, and putting together the final product.

## Interviews with South African jazz photographers

Sourcing South African jazz photographer to approach for this project was too difficult a task. I made contact with a few photographers of whom I was aware, and some I found through research and asking musicians. Several responded, but I chose three who I thought had contrasting styles of capturing the South African jazz musicians in action. My approach for the interview process was interactive, through semi-structured interviews, direct communication and via email. Before starting the interview process, I applied for and received ethical clearance from University of Cape Town, Faculty of Humanities. I ensured that each interviewee received a list questions, information about myself, and about the project and a consent form.

My first interviewee was Gregory Franz, who is well known as the resident jazz photographer in Cape Town. He has also been an important mentor for me in my own photography journey. Franz is known for shooting in different venues and festivals around the city, and capturing the sound of its

musicians in images. He also creates a weekly jazz gig guides to inform audiences about live music events in Cape Town.

My second interviewee, Jonathon Rees, is a photographer active in the Johannesburg scene, and is often resident photographer at the annual Standard Bank National Youth Jazz Festival in Makhanda. This interview was conducted via email.

Jeffery Abrahams, a well-known photographer for the Cape Times and Cape Town International Jazz Festival and many other jazz events was my final interview subject.

I based my questions around the following themes:

- The process that goes into each image:  
*What are the main aspects you try to portray in your images when shooting jazz musicians on stage?*
- The historical impact of image:  
*In your opinion how has SA jazz developed over the past few years?*
- The skill and passion of the photographer:  
*Why does this job require so much passion and skill?*
- Differentiation of shooting live jazz versus other genres:  
*What is your relationship with SA jazz and how does the element of live improvisational jazz impact the image?*
- The role or impact that this art form has on the South African Jazz community past, present and future:  
*How would you say SA jazz photographers have contributed to the SA jazz industry?*

I felt that it was important to structure my questions around these topics in order to explore the connection between the two art forms and investigate how the photographers experienced working in and around the world of jazz and the musicians who play it.

I wanted to investigate the differing approaches of each photographer, and how they interpret the music presented. In addition, I was interested in the varying styles used to capture the musician in their own element, including the uses of black and white photography, portrait style and colour capture. Each image tells a story of the musician and South African jazz, and correspondingly, each photographer contributes to the sound of South African jazz from behind the lens.

## The Performance and Exhibition

### Finding a venue

While designing the concept of this project there were many aspects that would play an important role in the way the showcase would be presented. An essential part of this presentation was the venue in which it was held. My vision was to host this event within a gallery space, rather than a typical music venue such as a theatre or concert hall. In this way, the audience would feel the artistic connection between the images and sounds on display. The sourcing of an appropriate venue was somewhat challenging because the space would need to accommodate the different elements of the performance and exhibition. Through a rigorous process of investigation and approaching numerous galleries and venues in and around Cape Town, I found success with Youngblood Africa Gallery,

based in the centre of Cape Town. The meeting with visual and live performance curators, Ina Wichterich and Wonga Bushe proved to be a success. The space specialises in helping young visual artists promote their work in a space where it can reach a broader audience, and the gallery also hosts concerts presented by young music artists. The Youngblood Africa Gallery has hosted many young South African jazz musicians' concerts, including Thandi Ntuli, Zoe Modiga, Sisonke Xonti and others. The curators offered me the opportunity to include my project in their monthly exhibition for September 2022. This meant that the work of the three photographers, and my own work would share the space with some of South Africa's top young visual artists, giving us the opportunity to sell our artworks to the public.

## **Curating the Images**

After conducting interviews with all the respective photographers, I asked each of them to send me a selection of their work. I gave them some guidelines as to what I was hoping to portray: I wanted images that reflected a mix of generations in the jazz genre and displayed the use of both colour and black and white. However, within those guidelines, I allowed them freedom of choice, as long as the theme was captured. Each photographer responded with different pictures and contrasting viewpoints selected from the personal favourites in their catalogues. Some chose shots of vocalists and instrumentalists, varied in age and gender. Other selections included portraits from different eras from festivals in the early 2000s festivals to recent years. Regardless of the picture, the focus remained on capturing the essence of the person in the shot, and the music behind it. Of the images that were sent to me I then selected five from each catalogue, giving a diverse and all-round view of the South African jazz landscape.

In addition to the works by the three participating photographers, I selected a number of photographs from my own catalogue. To make the final selection of my own works for the exhibition I took a different approach: Rather than select five images from my catalogue myself, I wanted the curators at the gallery to select the photographs they wanted to show, choosing images that spoke to them. This gave an unbiased view from a professional. I tend to look at my photographs more from a technical standpoint. Some curators felt that a particular image spoke to them more than others, and that it should be shown regardless of its technical flaws, as they were drawn more to the emotion of the capture. This led to some interesting conversations and debates about the merits of certain images. Each photographer was given a consent form to sign giving me permission to use their images for this project and gallery exhibition.

## **Curating the Music**

During the image selection process, I was always cognisant of the music that would be fitting for the performance. During the image selection process, I found myself thinking of how the music one selects can change the way the observer feels about an image. I felt compelled to select music that spoke more about the emotional content of the images and was mindful of the mood and tone of each image, and how it related to the artist and music. I also began conceptualising the way in which the images would be presented, and the order in which I would run the performance. I tried to base the music selection on an outline similar to that used to choose the images. I narrowed down selected artists to nine different musicians and made use of all the photographers' work. After doing a little more research, I found that these nine musicians drew inspiration from similar time periods in South African jazz history.

Each artist chosen represented different instrumentation, and how they also helped shape and grow the sound of the genre through various eras. The selected artists ranged from timeless and legendary musicians such as Sibongile Khumalo and Hilton Schilder, to shapeshifters of the South African jazz sound like Marcus Wyatt, Thandi Ntuli and Sisonke Xonti. Also included were artists representing South Africa's new age of jazz musicians. These were Sean Sanby, Muneeb Hermans and the multi dynamic Unity Band. Once artists and images were chosen, I carefully considered the repertoire list of songs for the performance. I chose those songs that were specifically connected to the story I wanted to tell. There is no one definitive way to select songs for a project like this, and as I continued working on the project, I realised that I had to go with my gut instinct and just choose songs that spoke to me. The final selection represented a mix of songs from different periods, representing the evolution of the South Africa jazz sound, and, while also showing the different styles of each artist. For the selection of music to correspond to my own images, I chose specific songs because I remembered that song being played when I took the photograph. For example, the performances of Sean Sanby's *Dreamers* live at Hanks Old Irish, Muneeb Hermans' *Influence* live at Hanks Old Irish, and Hilton Schilder's *Have I ever let you down before* live at The Commons Festival. I wanted to make the audience feel as if they were at these events, and in my shoes when I took the photographs, to give them better insight into my thought process. The aim was to create a visual representation of the song, and to give the audience a clear link between sound and image.

## **Framing the Images, Framing the Music**

### **Framing the images – Preparation, Prints, Position**

It was a difficult task to select the twenty images for this project. At the end of the extensive selection process, the team, which comprised the two Youngblood Gallery curators and myself in collaboration with the photographers, settled on five images from each photographer, resulting in twenty images in total. The images ranged between colour images and classic black and white portraits, and mixed grain and smoothness, giving a well-rounded visual representation of the music and the artists, while showcasing the different of styles of each photographer. Once the images were selected, they were sized and printed at ORMS photography print room, where I selected appropriate printing paper materials for each image. From the twenty images, only four were chosen for framing due to space in the exhibition and costs. After consulting with both curators, we came to the decision to frame the following four images:

- Sibongile Khumalo (colour, by Jeffery Abrahams),
- Thandi Ntuli (black and white, by Jonathon Rees),
- Thandeka Dladla (black and white, by Lauren Hendricks)
- Marco Maritz (black and white, by Lauren Hendricks)

There was a thread connecting each image selected. Each one represents something different, yet they share commonalities. Both the genre of South African jazz music and the world of photography, have always been predominately male driven (McAndrew and Widdop, 2021), (Couloute, 2021), yet it is evident through the works produced by female artists that female creatives are a huge part of the industry and need to be celebrated. This became quite apparent while receiving images, and selecting music for the performance, where most of the materials were produced by men. As a female in both creative fields, I felt it that there was a tremendous lack of representation in both communities but even more so in the world of photography. I felt compelled to showcase more female artists from all

generations, but in addition felt it was necessary to shine a spotlight on women in the photography field.

## **Framing the music – musical preparation**

After careful thought and curating a set list of songs to present in the performance, the next step was collecting the musical scores (usually referred to as “charts” in jazz parlance) and selecting band members. Some of the lead sheets were sourced directly from the artists, or from other musicians who had access to the charts. Most of the music I had to transcribe myself, due to the lack of written music for the selected songs. This is a common occurrence when compiling a concert incorporating South African jazz music: much of the music is learned aurally and is not notated.

The music ranged from the traditional South African groove sounds of *Thando’s Groove* by Sibongile Khumalo, to the straight-ahead swing of Sisonke Xontis *Introspection*, and included Marcus Wyatt’s experiments with irregular time signatures on *You Were There*, while introducing a mix of Salsa and Songo rhythms in The Unity Band’s *Peccadillo*. The repertoire chosen not only showed the growth of the genre, but also displayed the vast and rich tapestry of sounds of South African jazz. To pay homage to these great composers and their music, I assembled a band of young accomplished musicians. Many of the musicians had performed with the artists and bands being featured. Bassist, Sean Sanby was a featured artist, with his composition *Dreamers*, for which I wrote with original lyrics. Once charts were sourced or written we began rehearsing the music. I expressed to the band the importance of creating connection with the music and the images that were displayed; this was not just “a gig” but also an experience of the union of sound and image through South African jazz. I chose to document parts of each rehearsal process, to give insight into the developmental stages of the production.

## **Planning the event**

Whilst this project was in part an academic research initiative, to the public it would be seen as a performance, and with that came the necessary tasks of hosting an event, and the additional factors of including an exhibition. As project creator, I was required to handle all tasks myself.

The event occurred in two stages: First, the opening of the exhibition, and later the performance of the music.

The exhibition itself required extensive preparation, as it was to feature for the entire month of September, amongst other artworks. After each image was selected it was then printed on specific Epson matt photographic paper, which was specifically chosen to avoid any damage and reflective effects from outside or external lights. Once the images were sized and printed, the gallery required descriptive labels stating the names of the photographer, of the image, and details of the size and material used for printing, and lastly the price given by the photographer. Along with the presentation of the works, I was required to write an artist’s statement explaining the installation and concept behind the exhibit.

After the successful launch of the exhibition on 1 September 2022, the preparation for the performance event commenced. Elements that needed organising for the performance, aside from the charts and rehearsals, included booking the sound company who would provide the audio equipment needed for the event, as well as sourcing a videographer who would assist in filming the concert. I wanted to make the performance accessible not only for South African jazz supporters and the community, but especially for the youth, including high school students, undergraduate and postgraduate students, young photographers and other creatives. The performance was publicised

by the gallery in various media, and through my own social media channels.

# Findings: South African Jazz in Frame

## The role of image and photographer in South African jazz

### The visual historians

South African Jazz is such a dedicated genre of music and has become such an integral part of the fabric of South African history through artists and composers who have contributed greatly to its richness with a wide range of songs. Jazz photographers in the genre have also added their contribution to the richness of the genre with not only great photography becoming an essential part to documenting the history of jazz in the country. It has allowed for people to appreciate the artistry that jazz brings as well as the influence it has had on the people. It has also been a medium for people to express their political and social ideas and has become a significant part of South African culture. The unique sound of South African jazz can be heard in albums from artists like Hugh Masekela, Abdullah Ibrahim, and Miriam Makeba. Artists like these have helped to spread the sound of South African jazz across the world and have kept it alive through their dedication to the genre. More importantly their work has also helped to spread the message of the liberation struggle and the fight for freedom. One can say that jazz in South Africa is the soundtrack of South Africa's struggle for liberation. Photographers who captured these artists have played an important role in the preservation of the genre. They carry the role of being a "visual historian" of the genre and their work has been a key component in the documentation of the most iconic artists and their role in the creation and building of the genre we know today. While interviewing this seemed to be one the most prolific outcomes and common threads, I found in all my interviews:

We are documenting an important art form and creating a historical record. Our photographs capture a moment in time. (J Ress 2022, personal communication, 25 July).

It should be documented; we need to make people aware of what's happening around. (G Franz, personal communication, 27 April 2022).

We want to share the experience....that is the role we play, is making the experience available to a much wider audience (J Abrahams, 2022, personal communication, 24 June).

This has helped to ensure that the work of these musicians and their contribution to South African jazz is remembered and celebrated. It is through their work that has allowed South African jazz to have a lasting impact upon the world. This not only allows us to learn more about the genre but also serves as an important reminder of the importance of its preservation and has assisted in making sure that this sound can be experienced by future generations. As someone who has been behind the camera and in front of the bandstand, I realized how significant this connection between the two art forms is in this manner. Reflecting on my own having to create my own catalogue for this project reminded me of how many important moments in many artists' journeys I have been a part of capturing. Whether I'm behind the lens of my camera capturing a musician's performance or enjoying being on a band stand, I can appreciate the connection between music and image. With my own creative projects, it is fascinating to see how different platforms can be used to create and document powerful stories.

## **A potential member of the band**

When observing a photographer at a jazz performance, they often move with musicians, whether in moments of complete stillness or in the midst of musical chaos. Many of them have such a strong connection with the music that it plays a pivotal role in the way in which they capture the sounds, from the highs of upbeat and energetic songs to the lows of slow and melancholic ballads. The photographer understands the importance of capturing the emotion of the music and the energy in the room and uses the camera to capture the moment.

In an interview, world-renowned South African Jazz photographer Siphiwe Mhlambi speaks on this topic:

When somebody says 'no this is a trio' no it's a quartet. There's a photographer. He is also part of the band. So, you bring that in, you know. I mean I have a lot of CDs where you have your name mentioned not only as a photographer but as one of us, and that for me is a reward that surpasses them all (Mhlambi, 2020).

Prompted by this statement, I posed the question: Is the photographer a part of the band? to the photographers I interviewed. They seemed to find this question to be quite challenging to think about and answer, and each gave a different take.

No, definitely not. But the photographer may claim to be part of the wider jazz ecosystem, with a role in documenting and presenting the visual experience of live music. (J Ress 2022, personal communication, 25 July).

The band plays and enthralls the crowd after that what happens? Nothing. It's gone. I've got the images you see. Then the music and the experience will live on through the images. You'll see people look at old images and say, 'Oh I remember that concert!' you don't necessarily remember the music, but you remember the experience. So, in that sense the photographer is an extension of the band (J Abrahams, 2022, personal communication, 24 June).

As someone who inhabits both the photography sphere and the world of jazz performance, I considered what my answer would be to the same question. I do think that the photographer is a part of the band, but as another artistic extension of the music. While the musicians create magical soundscapes with melodies, the same could be said of capturing a visual moment. I believe that the photographer should be seen as an important creative partner who can help bring the music to life in another format. The photographer creates a visible moment captured, which can be replayed in the mind of an audience member just as profoundly as a melody may spark a memory of that very moment. Photographers can give bands a visual identity that help create an image that resonates with their audience. Ultimately, a good photographer can be a powerful tool to assist a band in reaching their fans and creating a lasting impact.

## **Photographer as a skilled improviser**

One of the key tenets of the jazz style is improvisation (Gridley et al., 1989). This involves soloists inventing melodies on top of a known chord progression, with no pre-written score to guide them (JAS, 2020). This requires a deep understanding of the music and the instrument, as well as skill,

commitment, and confidence. Similarly, photographers must have a comprehensive knowledge of their tools, light, and processes to capture their desired images, often without a “score” or lighting diagram (Wein, 2020). The music photographer is thus akin to the jazz soloist, relying on their own skill to produce their artwork. When shooting many South African jazz performances, the photographer often encounters poor lighting, and challenging spaces in which they must capture the image. The photographer must often rely on both their technical skills and on their ability to adapt and change or “improvise” on the spot. It requires a deep understanding of music, the ability to think quickly and to be able to take ideas and make them into something new. It also requires the ability to listen and be present in the moment, to be able to feel and respond to the music as it is being created. All these aspects that are required of the jazz photographer could be said to be important to the jazz musician in performance.

Ress, in his interview reflects on these facets of live music photography:

The jazz photographer must work with available light, which is often limited, and they must often work in confined spaces while taking care to not disturb the performers or the audience. It requires great empathy, awareness and dedication to the craft. The magic moment may come just once and you must be ready – in your position, in your mind, and with the right composition and all the technical aspects covered, from focus to exposure. This kind of photography is one of the most difficult and rewarding things I have ever done (J Ress 2022, personal communication, 25 July).

In my experiences behind the lens when shooting many young South African jazz musicians, I have captured the best images of them when they are in a raw and unrehearsed state of being. Capturing moments of a solo performance can be challenging, but it can also be incredibly rewarding. When shooting a jazz musician, it is important to be aware of the entire band, as well as the individual performer. The best images often come from capturing the subtle moments of the soloist: their hands and fingers moving across the instrument, their eyes focused on the music, and their body language as they play. Additionally, it is important to be mindful of the other musicians in the band and the overall energy of the performance. By taking note of these elements, the photographer can capture a truly authentic and powerful image.

In my interview with Gregory Franz, in response to the question, do you think that the most iconic pictures come from improvising? he replied, “I think so” (G Franz, personal communication, 27 April 2022).

## **Post Production: Recordings, Editing process, Visuals**

One of the most crucial elements of this project is the video recording of the exhibition and the performance. Since it is partly a visual project, I made sure that the footage was captured in a way that gives the viewers a deeper understanding of the process. The main performance was filmed by Small Films, and sound the sound was recorded by Concept Records. Both of these are South African companies that work with young musicians in pursuing their visual and recording projects. It was extremely important to me to use young and upcoming individuals in every part of this project, as it gives opportunities to them to explore new projects. Fellow musician and creative, Sean Sanby, assisted with filming the interviews, and was responsible for the videography and sound recording.

After the performance, together with my editing team, I went through each frame in order to analyse the footage, and exchange detailed notes regarding what worked and what did not. This process as forced me to view the project in its entirety, as viewer rather than creator. This allowed me to make more informed decisions regarding the structure, pacing, and overall feel of the performance. I was able to spot certain moments in the final product that I had not noticed when I was actively involved in the production and performance process. It was also interesting to see how the public received my work, be it interviewee, exhibition spectator or concertgoer.

After several hours of review, I created a comprehensive report with detailed notes on the footage of the performance. These notes consisted of what I wanted to include in the final video presentation: rehearsal footage, behind the scenes exhibition shots, certain snippets from interviews and important moments from the show. This report was reviewed and implemented by the production team. My idea was to present the concert performance as the main part of the project, while still incorporating scenes from interviews, the main exhibition and rehearsals to give the viewer an insight to the process behind the concept of the show.

As the final video took shape, I could begin to see the beauty in the performance, the small details that may have been overlooked, and the mistakes that were made, which possibly could have been done differently in the project. Once everything was synced and edited I could then add final changes to the video presentation linking together all the pieces.

# Conclusion

This creative research project was a deep dive into the fascinating territories of South African jazz culture and its history, told through images and music. Through interviews and self-experience, I looked into the close connections between the music, the musician, the photographer and the final image. The image and sounds created together become a collaborative work of art, which in tandem tell the stories of South African jazz music. This project has not only given me a deeper understanding of the relationship between the two art forms, photography and jazz, but it has also opened a new door to explore in the genre. Besides discovering connections, the project also shines a light on the absence of wider recognition and preservation of this monumental part of our history. My research also aimed to bring forward the lack of academic research on the works of known and unknown photographers who captured so many South African jazz moments, which in turn reflect moments in our country's history.

It was hugely challenging to create this project, as I was required to fulfil a number of pivotal roles, whilst directing and driving the project forward. To say it was difficult would be an understatement. The experience has been impactful on my journey as both photographer and performer. Juggling all of the aspects of the process presented various challenges, but also contributed to my development and experience in mounting a production of this nature.

After countless months of preparation and work, my vision for this project can clearly be seen in my final presentation in the video provided: a detailed, curated representation of South African jazz, where imagery meets melody, paying tribute to the musical heroes of past and present. Connecting my passions of both jazz and photography has inspired me to continue to create within these two spheres. The experience has stressed the importance of continuing rich legacy, and also highlighted the need to document that legacy, and to create accessible channels for future generations to explore.

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# Appendix: Images from the project

## South African Jazz In Frame – Poster

23 September 2022 – Live at Youngblood Gallery



# South African Jazz In Frame: Photographic exhibition opening poster

1 September 2022 – Live at Youngblood Gallery

## LOVE JOURNEY

by  
ZINGISA GEQUEZA

### Rebirth

by  
Chenjerai and Mambakwedza Mutasa

### Metamorphosis

by  
Gerhard Van der Westhuizen &  
Mambakwedza Mutasa

### The Identity of African Masks

by  
Joel Kabangu

### South African Jazz in Frame

by  
Lauren Hendricks, Jonathan Rees  
Gregory Franz, Jeffery Abrahams

### The Enigma

by  
Gerhard Van der Westhuizen

### A Life Story in Reality

by  
Neo Pretorius

### Frida Kahlo in love

by  
Tertius van Dyk

### Kintsugi

by  
Jariid featuring  
Joel Mamboka and Shakes Mbolekwana

**SPECTRUM** | A video installation with  
Cheshire Vineyard by  
Ramsey Lewis

### Live Performances

by  
Lauren Hendricks & Liso Gcwabe



## Pictures arriving to the gallery after being printed

26 August 2022



## Four chosen images framed and hung on exhibition day

1 September 2022



# Full view of images hung on exhibition day

1 September 2022



**Featured photographer Gregory Franz and author at the exhibition launch**



## Interview Questions

- In your opinion how has South African jazz developed over the past few years?
- What are the main aspects you try to portray in your images when shooting jazz musicians on stage?
- Why does this job require so much passion and skill?
- When you look at historical jazz images from album covers to posters, the common thread is that most of them are shot in black and white. What would you say are the reasons for this and do you think it affects the story of the image?
- Is the photographer a member of the band?
- What is your relationship with South African jazz and how does the element of live improvisational jazz impact the image?
- Before shooting jazz musicians do you listen to their music beforehand or do you choose to let it naturally play out?
- How would you say South African jazz photographers have contributed to the South African jazz industry?
- What has been your most memorable experience shooting a South African jazz that has stood out to you?

## Ethics Clearance



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11 October 2021

**HDC REF: 9/2021**

Dear Lauren

**Project title for MMus: South African Jazz in Frame**

Thank you for your ethics application dated 25 May 2021. It is my pleasure to inform you that the above-mentioned study has been formally approved.

The completed forms should be submitted to Sheila Taylor for record keeping.

**Approval is granted for 2 years.**

Please submit a brief progress report if the study continues beyond the approval time frame.

The on-going ethical conduct remains the responsibility of the principal investigator (the supervisor).

Please quote the reference number in all your ethics related correspondences.

Signed by candidate

Yours sincerely,

Associate Professor Anri Herbst

Ethics representative  
Higher Degrees Committee  
Faculty Ethics Research Committee