

25 Interview with Niklaus Troxler

Steff Rohrbach

“A painting is music you can see, and music is a painting you can hear” – thus runs the saying generally attributed to the trumpeter Miles Davis (who also painted, as it happens).¹ Jackson Pollock also reputedly listened to jazz as he created his Abstract Expressionist canvases, drip by drip and beat by beat, so to speak.² The connections between the visual arts and jazz could be extended almost indefinitely. In Switzerland, these two art forms have come together most notably in the person of Niklaus Troxler,³ a renowned graphic designer who has received numerous awards and whose works feature in the world’s preeminent collections, from the Museums of Modern Art in New York and Toyama in Japan to the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam and the museums of Hamburg, Essen and Zurich. Known in the scene as “Knox”, he was born in Willisau in Canton Lucerne in 1947, studied at the School of Design in Lucerne, worked as an art director in Paris in 1971/72 and then set up his own studio back home in Willisau. From 1998 to 2013, he was also a professor of communication design at the State Academy of Fine Arts in Stuttgart. But the development of Troxler’s unmistakable graphic style was arguably a result of his second passion: jazz. Knox began organising jazz concerts in 1966 and in 1975 founded the Willisau Jazz Festival, whose director he remained until 2009. Thanks to Knox, Willisau was one of the first and most important venues for the South African jazz exiles who visited Switzerland from the 1960s onwards. Ample documentary proof of his activity as both artist and jazz entrepreneur is to be found in the 700 pages and 800 illustrations of the weighty tome *Niklaus Troxler – Willisau and All That Jazz 1966–2013*, published in 2013.⁴ In fact, Knox was one of the first concert organisers in the northern hemisphere to engage the finest South African jazz musicians, from the pianist Abdullah Ibrahim – who remains “Dollar Brand” for Knox

¹ See, for example, [Miles Davis Estate]: “Montreal Museum Pays Homage To The Magic of Miles Davis” at www.milesdavis.com/news/montreal-museum-pays-homage-to-the-magic-of-miles-davis/ (accessed January 2025).

² See, for example, The Museum of Modern Art: “Jackson Pollock. One: Number 31, 1950. 1950”, at www.moma.org/audio/playlist/289/142 (accessed January 2025).

³ See www.troxlerart.ch/news (accessed January 2025).

⁴ Edited by Olivier Senn and Niklaus Troxler. Lucerne & Bern: Hochschule Luzern – Musik, Till Schap Edition, 2013.

and many others in Switzerland – to the saxophonist Zim Ngqawana, Chris McGregor and the Brotherhood of Breath and many more.

Knox and his wife Ems live variously in Willisau and Berlin. His older brother Walter – another jazz enthusiast – also lives in Willisau, while Knox’s nephew, the jazz drummer Arno Troxler, took over the management of the Festival in 2010. The following interview with Knox took place in Willisau, a somewhat dreamy, tranquil and seemingly provincial town whose festival hall has been transformed into a world jazz stage every August since 1975.



Figure 25.1. Niklaus Troxler.

Steff Rohrbach: *Knox, how did you come to organise jazz concerts?*

Niklaus Troxler: I used to go to the “Jazz in der Aula” concerts from an early age that Arild Wideröe organised for several years in Baden in Canton Aargau. He was a native Norwegian who returned to Baden after his military service in 1961.⁵ He organised swing and bebop concerts, big events, and also brought his compatriot Jan Garbarek along, early on. He frequently

⁵ Bruno Rub, “...if it ain’t got that swing’: 30 Jahre ‘Jazz in der Aula’”, in *Badener Neujahrsblätter*, 69 (1994), 85–94.

engaged Henri Chaix⁶ with his trio from Geneva. They accompanied soloists such as Benny Carter, Lucky Thompson and Ben Webster.

One of my early key experiences was a big double concert in Lucerne. In the first part, Oscar “Papa” Celestin⁷ played with his New Orleans Band. They were all around 70 or 80 years old. And the second part featured Sister Rosetta Tharpe⁸ – a really great gospel and blues singer who was a reference point for many rock musicians, and who is said to have been one of the originators of rock music itself.

SR: *Is it right that you studied in Lucerne and then worked in Paris at a time when you were already organising concerts in Willisau?*

NT: Exactly – and quite a lot of concerts, too. I made the right contacts in Paris. I heard Keith Jarrett with Miles Davis there and hired Jarrett for Willisau. The same thing happened with Chick Corea in 1972. I wanted to come back to Willisau because of Ems anyway, whom I later married. I briefly thought about staying in Paris because there were lots of good concerts going on. But I wanted to work for myself and not as an employee of anyone else – and I wanted to organise jazz concerts: in Willisau! That was how it all started.

SR: *This brings us to how you began working with South African musicians. Dollar Brand was the first one you engaged?*

NT: I brought him to Willisau early on, in 1972, even before the first actual Willisau Festival and before the Brotherhood of Breath – they only played in Willisau in 1973. But I had already engaged Irène Schweizer with Makaya Ntshoko in 1971. The concert was called “Makaya meets Irène Schweizer” and featured Jürg Grau (trumpet and guitar), Irène Schweizer (piano), Peter K. Frey (bass) and Makaya (drums). That was Irène’s wish, she really wanted to meet Makaya and put together a group with him. It was important to her. [Troxler points to photos in the Willisau book mentioned above] There’s Makaya, he was a young lad back then. But I had already engaged Irène before that concert, back in 1968, in a trio with Pierre Favre and Jiří (George) Mráz.⁹ And she came back the following year, 1969, with Evan Parker and the Pierre Favre Trio, with Peter Kowald on bass. And in 1970 she played in the John Tchicai Trio, also with Pierre Favre on drums.

SR: *Did you already know Makaya in 1971?*

NT: Yes, through Dollar, because I’d naturally also gone to the Africana Club in Zurich where they’d played in 1962/63.

⁶ Henri Chaix (1925–1999), Swiss pianist, arranger and orchestral conductor who studied at the Conservatoire de musique de Genève. See <https://swissjazzorama.ch/index.php?id=314>, accessed October 2024.

⁷ Oscar Phillip “Papa” Celestin (1884–1994), American pioneer of New Orleans jazz.

⁸ Rosetta Tharpe, born Rosetta Nubin (1915–1973), American gospel, jazz and blues singer and guitarist who adopted the name “Sister Rosetta Tharpe” in 1944.

⁹ Jiří (George) Mráz (1944–2021), Czech bassist, emigrated to the USA in 1968 and only returned to Prague in 1990.

SR: *That was where their trio was discovered by Duke Ellington, along with Dollar's girlfriend at the time, Sathima Bea Benjamin. It was later rumoured that Ellington had his eye on Benjamin.*

NT: That's easy to imagine. She was always there with Dollar, usually to sing a little number.

SR: *I heard her with Dollar Brand in 1995 when she came on stage for a song, maybe two. She sounded quite fragile.*

NT: He'd get her to sing, though not for us. I always wondered: When will she come on stage? But she never came.

SR: *Not even when she was on the line-up for their second concert, in 1974?*

NT: She was always there, but she didn't sing. The first time, in 1972, I actually wanted Dollar Brand to play solo and announced the concert thus in the programme. Then he called me and said they were coming as a trio, with Carlos Ward¹⁰ and Billy Higgins. That wasn't the right way to do things. And then he only turned up with Carlos Ward anyway. In fact, they were a wonderful duo. It wasn't like later, when he'd bring his musicians to the front then send them back again. There was just this wonderful duo on stage. Dollar was already playing solos at the time, but both of them were on the same level and were a really great duo.

SR: *In 1972, on the album Dollar Brand's African Space Program with Sathima Bea Benjamin (vocals), Roland Alexander (tenor saxophone, percussion), Carlos Ward (alto saxophone), Joe Gardner (trumpet), Johnny Dyani (bass), Roy Brooks (drums) and Joe Malinga (flute and percussion), Dollar not only played piano, but also the soprano saxophone and flute.*

NT: That's right, he didn't just play the piano. Bea was in the line-up with us, but she didn't come on stage and didn't sing.

SR: *I've tried in vain to contact Dollar but was sent two refusals, probably by his wife. I invited the 86-year-old Six Trutt and his son Daniel to a concert that Abdullah Ibrahim gave at the Culture and Convention Centre Lucerne (KKL) in spring 2024 (entitled "Solo & Ekaya") as I wanted the two old men to see each other again. Dollar was known to have spent a lot of time at the Trutt family home in Ichertswil. Six has since died.*

NT: What, Dollar played at the KKL? I hadn't realised that! But yes, I occasionally visited Six at home on a Sunday, and Dollar was there several times. It was brilliant!

Makaya didn't think much of Dollar anymore, and when he used to drink he would even swear at Dollar. I've been deeply troubled by Dollar's behaviour, especially when he's on his ego trip and treats his musicians so appallingly. If he only played solo, I might want to hear him. But back in the day with Six, that was something! And back in the old church in Boswil!

SR: *He also made an album in Boswil.¹¹*

¹⁰ Carlos Ward (born 1940), American saxophonist, flautist and composer.

¹¹ Abdullah Ibrahim | Dollar Brand | Boswil Concert 1973 featuring Bea Benjamin, see <https://abdul->

NT: Before that, he'd not been in the area for quite a while. I think he'd gone back to South Africa.

SR: *According to the biography on his homepage,¹² he and Benjamin married and went to the USA in 1965. At some point – probably much later – they lived in the famous Chelsea Hotel in New York. But he apparently travelled back to Cape Town in 1968, later lived in Swaziland (today eSwatini) and then Cape Town again before moving to the USA.*

NT: Either way, he hadn't been heard in Europe for a long time – though it may have seemed longer to me because I was still young. I was attending the School of Arts and Crafts in Lucerne at the time. And it was there, in around 1969/70, that Thys Flüeler organised a concert with him in the hall of the Union Hotel. Thys had heard him somewhere beforehand and then engaged him. Only insiders knew about it. I advertised it throughout the arts and crafts school. It was a sensation for us, a wonderful concert – just like his solo record at the time, simply marvellous! I made sure that I could get hold of him, just like I always did, because I was already organising concerts. That's how it came about for us. He wasn't on tour, it was his only concert in Switzerland and it was such a hit! He didn't have a big audience yet, but insiders knew about him. There was his solo record, his trio's record produced by Ellington, and *Anatomy of a South African Village*,¹³ the record that I still love hearing, and which I find as incredible as the first time I heard it. It's since been re-released several times by different labels. Makaya and Johnny Gertze are also on it.

SR: *What was your relationship like with Dollar Brand back then?*

NT: I had a good relationship with Dollar, absolutely. I always called him Dollar when he rang on the phone. "Hey, Dollar", I'd say. "Don't call me Dollar!" he'd respond. But then I'd reply that I knew why, because he loved the dollar – I always made a joke out of it.

SR: *He's also still "Dollar" for the Trutt family ...*

NT: ... of course! But he always spoke well of me – even when I turned him down when he wanted to play in Willisau and I had to tell him that I wasn't interested. People have told me that he used to rave about Willisau elsewhere. Even despite his not being on the programme very often.

SR: *He played in Willisau just four times.*

lahibrahim.co.za/record/dollar-brand-featuring-bea-benjamin-boswil-concert-1973/ (accessed October 2024).

¹² Anon., Abdullah Ibrahim Biography, at <https://abdullahibrahim.co.za/biography/> (accessed October 2024).

¹³ The trio recorded the album *Anatomy of a South African Village* on 30 January 1965, live at the Jazzhus Montmartre in Copenhagen. The eponymous title track was commissioned in 1964 from Dollar Brand for performance with his trio and the Danish Radio Orchestra. See Martin Kunzler, *Jazz-Lexikon*. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2002, 133) and www.allmusic.com/album/anatomy-of-a-south-african-village-mw0000100757 (accessed November 2024).

NT: That's right. But the "African Space Program" was of course very important to him.¹⁴

SR: *Johnny Dyani also played in that concert ...*

NT: ... exactly! I also hired Johnny several times. And I thought the world of Makaya! After the early concert in 1971, I engaged him at the first Festival along with the saxophonist John Tchicai, then in 1975 in the "John Tchicai-Irène Schweizer Group" together with Buschi Niebergall (bass). That concert was released on record the following year, entitled *Willi the Pig*.¹⁵ John Corbett, a journalist and producer from Chicago, reissued it on CD in the year 2000.¹⁶ And after that Festival, I had Makaya play with the Joe McPhee Trio and the synthesiser pioneer John Snyder on 11 October.¹⁷ That was a concert I organised with Werner X. Uehlinger, whose label Hat Hut Records released the concert as its second-ever LP.¹⁸ Joe McPhee and Makaya went well together. The disc was later reissued as a CD, I think also by John Corbett in Chicago.¹⁹ I was a big fan of Makaya's and invited "Makaya & the Tsotsis" to the Festival in 1976. That was a must!

SR: *Makaya's LP of the same name came out soon after that. You can't tell from the music that they'd gone into the studio in Bern to record without preparing any music in advance – at least according to what Bob Degen has told me.*²⁰

NT: I listened to the record again after I learnt of Makaya's recent death. The live music is also brilliant, the pieces are fully played out, Heinz Sauer is super and Bob Degen too – I didn't even know he was still alive. He was always modest and underrated as a pianist. And Isla Eckinger is great, of course!

SR: *Makaya played at the same Festival a second time.*

NT: That was in the "Drum Music Concert" on 29 August 1976, with Pierre Favre, Stu Martin and Louis Moholo.²¹ We had to use a trick because I'd set up an extreme programme for the

¹⁴ This concert took place in Willisau on 18 May 1974. See www.willisaujazzarchive.ch/concerts/1974/1093.html (accessed January 2025).

¹⁵ John Tchicai-Irène Schweizer-Group, *Willi The Pig (Live At The Willisau Jazz Festival)*. Willisau: Live Records, WIL-1, 1976. See www.discogs.com/de/master/259423-John-Tchicai-Irene-Schweizer-Group-Willi-The-Pig-Live-At-The-Willisau-Jazz-Festival (accessed November 2024).

¹⁶ [Chicago]: Atavistic, 2000.

¹⁷ See www.willisaujazzarchive.ch/concerts/1975/1014.html (accessed November 2024).

¹⁸ It was the label's second LP in 1976, "B". The LP "A", of 1975, was Joe McPhee's *Black Magic Man*. See www.jazzlists.com/SJ_Label_HatHut_ABC.htm (accessed November 2024). See also Joe McPhee: *The Willisau Concert featuring John Snyder and Makaya Ntshoko. The Mekka of Creative Music in Europe*. See www.youtube.com/watch?v=r3_49gNbb9I&list=PLh-8ZxDxRQ1ZSUL8i1M-ujI7xrb7u6Cb29 (accessed January 2025). The album starts with a remarkable solo introduction by Makaya.

¹⁹ The CD was released in 2017 by the Chicago label Corbett vs Dempsey. See www.discogs.com/de/release/11438666-Joe-McPhee-Featuring-John-Snyder-3-And-Makaya-Ntshoko-The-Willisau-Concert (accessed November 2024).

²⁰ See the interview with Bob Degen in this book.

²¹ See www.willisaujazzarchive.ch/people-acts/act/drum-music-concert.html (accessed January 2025).

last night. We had both the Schlippenbach Quartet and the Charles Mingus Quintet on stage, one after the other, because that Sunday was the only day that both groups were able to play. I'd heard from some French people I knew that while Mingus was a bass player and not a pianist, he'd check out the grand piano before a concert. If he wasn't satisfied, he wouldn't play at all. So we decided to have the grand piano retuned on a lorry in an industrial shed between the two concerts. To do this, we had to move the stage elsewhere, and I wanted to use the drummers to bridge the gap. Dannie Richmond heard about it – he was Mingus's drummer – and he really wanted to be in it, but it was too late because the four drum sets were already set up. They played for about an hour, the grand piano was set up during the break, Mingus indeed played a few chords on it – and gave the thumbs-up. It had worked. I'll never forget that occasion, it was wonderful! After that, Makaya didn't come back for quite a while.

SR: According to the archives, he performed with Hannibal Marvin Peterson's Sunrise Orchestra in 1977, then with Where's Africa, Omri Ziegele and Irène Schweizer in 2005, and with John Tchicai and Vitold Rek in 2008.

NT: He married a woman from Willisau. Makaya himself told me. She lived near the Mohren Restaurant. I think her surname was Hofer, and I'd known her as a child.

SR: That was his second wife, who was the mother of his younger daughter and his son.

NT: I never saw her with Makaya. I was in Basel a few times when he played at the Totentanz, where the iron sculptor Peter Fürst used to organise concerts.

SR: But you engaged Makaya again in 2005, along with Irène and Omri.

NT: Irène told me that she was playing African music with Omri, to which I replied that it would be nice to have Makaya with us again.

SR: So it wasn't Irène's suggestion?

NT: No, but she asked if he was playing again. I'd heard that he had started up a "Tsotsis" band again.

SR: They were the "New Tsotsis", featuring Andy Scherrer (saxophone), Vera Kappeler (piano) and Stephan Kurmann (bass).

NT: Anyway, we asked Makaya and he agreed to come. Omri also liked the idea. The trio was actually intended only for Willisau, but fortunately they kept it going. It was a good thing, and resulted in a nice record. Later I had a phone call with Tchicai. We were just chatting, and he said that he'd like to play in Willisau again, that he was now playing with the Polish bassist Vitold Rek, but that he'd like to add a drummer. I suggested Makaya, and asked him myself. So their trio played in the "Forum" that we set up here in Willisau for a while. The musicians had fun together, and Tchicai had already organised three or four additional concerts in Germany. I was pleased to have suggested it, but no record was made of it. That's a pity!

SR: Let's move on to the concerts with Chris McGregor's Brotherhood of Breath.

NT: Yes. That was even more intense! The first took place in late January 1973 in the Mohren, which was also released as our first Willisau LP. I had previously heard the band at the Zurich Festival, which still took place in the Cinema Urban.²² I have to tell you: They played just insanely! But that festival had strict time slots for each concert, so our dear friend Bruno Spoerri came onto the stage and wanted to bring their concert to a close. But the audience was of a very different opinion and screamed and screamed and wanted to hear more of the music. So the organisers simply turned off the musicians' microphones! I was really annoyed with Bruno, and it only upset the audience even more. You can't do that, even if the time slots for three or four groups are tight. Anyway, I then met the musicians backstage and engaged them for a whole evening.²³ That was two weeks after I'd brought Irène Schweizer's trio²⁴ and just before Keith Jarrett²⁵ performed solo. That all happened in this short space of time, it was unbelievable!

SR: *You engaged the Brotherhood for March 1975 and again in late August, at the Festival itself.*

NT: That was on the first evening of the Festival. I already knew them by then, and I put them on the programme several times afterwards. This led to the Mike Osborne Trio with Harry Miller and Louis Moholo. Harry was very active, which was also reflected on the Festival programme. He and his wife Hazel founded the Ogun label that was the first to release the Brotherhood concert. That's the one with the tree on the cover. After that, I designed several record sleeves for Ogun.

SR: *Can you tell us about the incident with the Brotherhood back in 1973?*

NT: Ah! That was when three or four of them spent the night at the police station! I hadn't realised that they'd already arrived the day before the concert. We'd got permission to extend alcohol licensing hours after the concert at the Mohren. We were already at home when the police rang us at about four o'clock in the morning to say they had three or four musicians at

²² That Zurich concert took place on 16 September 1972. Alexis Korner and Snape were among those playing that evening. Bruno Spoerri has described this episode as follows: "The controversial performance by Chris McGregor and the Brotherhood of Breath remains unforgettable. They had returned to the city where he had started his career outside South Africa with the Blue Notes back in 1964. After an hour of the most intense free music, no one made any attempt to clear the stage for the bluesman Alexis Korner. After several fruitless interventions, ultimately the curtain was simply drawn across the stage – but a few seconds later, the indefatigable Dudu Pukwana was already standing at the front of the stage, playing on. Then Alexis Korner finally arrived to play his blues-soaked music. But after just a few numbers he announced: 'Let me introduce some friends', and the whole Brotherhood was back again. The critic of the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* declared that the 'miserable, chaotic way they blew their instruments and made a racket, each against the other defies description' and added that it was 'maddening'. But other listeners were still raving about this event for years afterwards". Bruno Spoerri (ed.), *Jazz in der Schweiz – Geschichte und Geschichten*. Second edition. Zurich: Chronos, 2006, 142.

²³ This concert took place on 27 January 1973. See www.willisaujazzarchive.ch/concerts/1973/1076.html (accessed January 2025).

²⁴ Irène Schweizer (piano), Buschi Niebergall (bass), Allen Blairman (drums), 14 January 1973. See www.willisaujazzarchive.ch/concerts/1973/1075.html (accessed January 2025).

²⁵ Keith Jarrett's solo piano concert took place on 30 March 1973. See www.willisaujazzarchive.ch/concerts/1973/1079.html (accessed January 2025).

the police station, and they'd have to stay in the cells while they sobered up. I rang back in the morning, but the police told me they were all fast asleep, so we left them there. I went to the police station around midday. There they were, in the sobering-up cell: Louis Moholo, Dudu Pukwana and Mongezi Feza, the trumpet player. They'd wandered around town the previous night, drunk, playing brass instruments and making a racket, at which the police had to go and arrest them! So I fetched them from the police station and took them to the Mohren. The others were there, waiting for them and laughing, ready to rehearse. But now the real trouble began, because they'd stolen the trombone that belonged to Malcolm Griffiths.²⁶ He was angry and told them so. There ensued a loud argument between the three of them and Malcolm that descended into racism. He not only refused to play that evening, but also left the Brotherhood and never performed with them again. They still had two trombonists – Radu Malfatti and Nick Evans – but they were supposed to have three. Malcolm sat at the mixing desk when the concert was recorded, truly depressed. I just think now that it was really tragic. It was unbelievable. But Chris McGregor remained relaxed and was certain that it would all turn out well. He was just a kind man. But when he slammed the piano lid shut and told them: Now focus all of you, we're going to play! – it worked. Unlike Dollar, he had his musicians under control in a kind way. He was a marvellous person! He brought everything together, time and again, while letting his wild bunch play and let their hair down. They might have had problems amongst themselves, but they then turned them into something positive on stage. Chris understood them wonderfully. He had a talent for making positive musical energy out of it all.

SR: *And how did the audience react?*

NT: It was great – it was a huge party, and of course they played much more than could be put on the LP. We invited them several times again after that – twice in 1975 – and it was always sensational. The same was true when we invited individual members of the Brotherhood. It's all in the book. And Mongezi Feza – did you get to know him?

SR: *Unfortunately not.*

NT: Hey, he was great! When he came back in 1975, before the Festival (which is always in late August/early September), we sat together in the Mohren and he said he'd like a large glass of red wine. When they brought him one, he looked very downhearted and said: "Oh no, not this glass, a big one!" He recalled having been given red wine in a Burgundy goblet two years earlier, so he went to the cupboard, pointed to the corresponding glass, and was very happy when they brought it. It's just a tiny episode, but it's things like this that stay in your memory. Mongezi unfortunately died soon after that Festival, in December 1975. He was only 30. It was probably a heart attack, not the result of alcohol or drugs. He was pretty careful about that kind of stuff, so we were all perplexed.

²⁶ Malcolm Griffiths (1941–2021), British trombonist, played as lead trombonist with the Buddy Rich Big Band, then as a session musician in the UK (including on The Pogues' "Fairytale of New York"). He and Moholo seem to have got over their dispute, as they later played together again, including in Isipongo at Willisau on 29 August 1976. See for example John Altman, "Malcolm Griffiths (1941–2021). Tribute" in *UK Jazz News* (21 January 2021), <https://londonjazznews.com/2021/01/21/malcolm-griffiths-1941-2021-tribute-by-john-altman/> and www.willisaujazzarchive.ch/concerts/1976/1111.html (both accessed January 2025).

Willisau Freitag 21.März 20.00 Uhr Hotel Mohren

Chris McGregor's

BROTHERHOOD OF BREATH

Chris McGregor Alan Skidmore Mike Osborne Dudu Pukwana Elton Dean
Evan Parker Mongezi Feza Harry Beckett Mark Charig Nick Evans Radu
Malfatti Harry Miller Louis Moholo

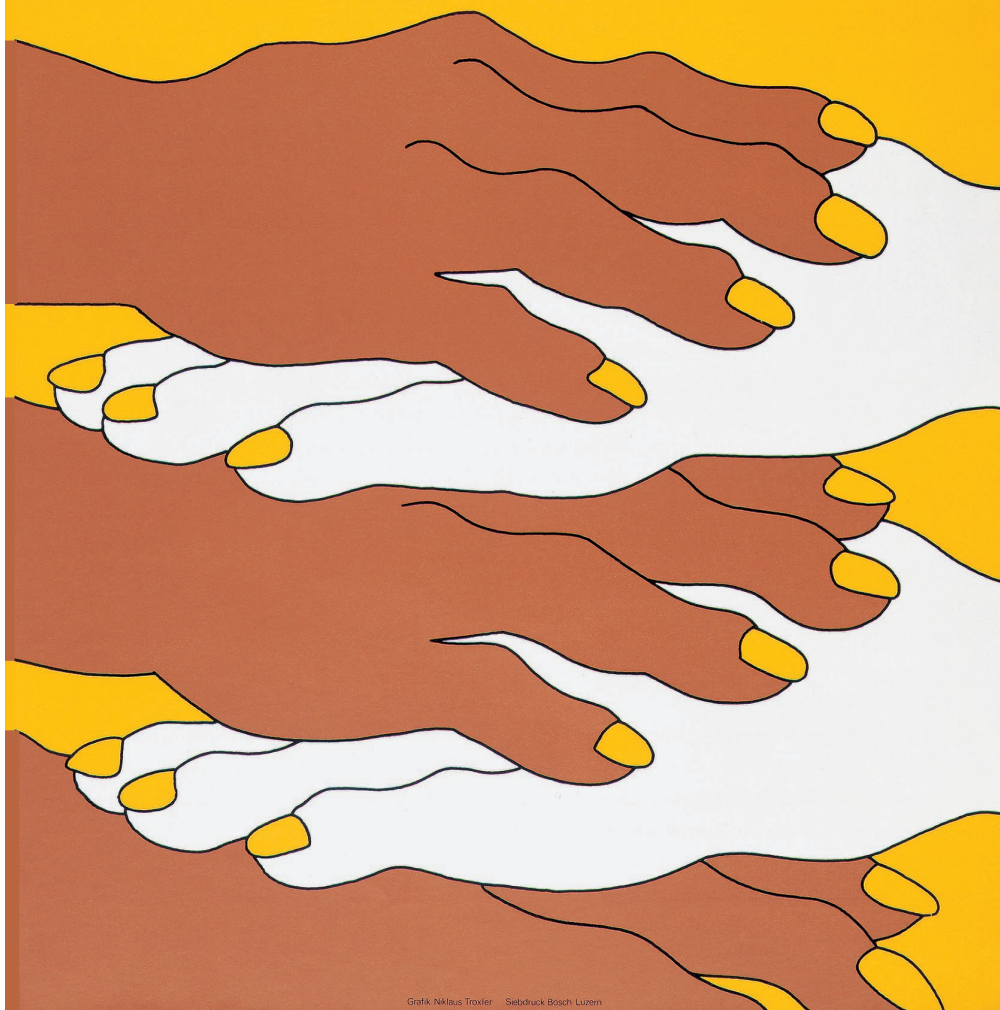


Figure 25.2. Troxler's 1975 poster for the Brotherhood of Breath in Willisau. Courtesy of Niklaus Troxler.

SR: *And did you engage the Blue Notes in Willisau too, with Mongezi, Dudu, Chris and everyone too?*

NT: No, I never did!

SR: *Had they already disbanded when you started organising concerts?*

NT: No, they were still playing! I used to help William Patry (1946–2009) a bit. He organised a festival in Nyon in Switzerland for two or three years. He invited the Blue Notes and there's a recording of them there, it's a double album.²⁷ Technically it's a rather poor recording, but the quartet's concert was sensational. Mongezi was no longer with them, but Chris McGregor, Johnny Dyani, Dudu Pukwana and Louis Moholo were playing. I never had them in Willisau.

SR: *But Johnny Dyani played in Willisau several times.*

NT: Yes, and he also gave a solo concert in 1978. That came about quite by chance. He was playing in a trio with David Murray²⁸ and Andrew Cyrille.²⁹ They brought out a Hat Hut record in 1978 entitled *D3 Family*.³⁰ Johnny had already played in Willisau two or three days earlier and told us he'd also like to play solo here. So we managed to include him. He sang and spoke wonderfully, played the piano and drums besides his bass, he did everything. A few years ago I got a call from Sweden. They had a cassette tape of the concert – every group received a cassette tape of their performance from us. But Swiss Radio had also recorded that concert, and they asked me to design the cover. It was released as a double vinyl disc entitled *African Bass Solo*.³¹ I also wrote the liner notes and had photos to go with it. They released it at 45 rpm. The record begins with Johnny's voice with its "click" sounds. His sons gave their consent for the release. Johnny's stepson Thomas Dyani, a drummer and vocalist, has played in Willisau several times.

Later, at my last Festival, in 2009, we had a concert with Zim Ngqawana (whose name I admit I can barely pronounce).³² He came with his absolute dream line-up, the Zimology Quartet with William Parker,³³ Matthew Shipp³⁴ and Nasheet Waits.³⁵ I would love to have that on record as it was such a great concert. I always wanted to make a record with Zim, who was a real star

²⁷ We have found no such album. It was probably the extract from the concert on magnetic tape of which the Swiss National Sound Archives holds a digital copy (shelfmark FN 26BD 1393) mentioned by Christian Steulet in his article "Der Wandel der schweizerischen Jazzszene im Spiegel von JazzNyon", in *European Journal of Musicology*, 16(1), 124–135, here 135. See <https://doi.org/10.5450/ejm.2017.16.5783> (accessed January 2025).

²⁸ David Murray (born 1955), American tenor saxophonist, bass clarinetist, composer and bandleader.

²⁹ Andrew Cyrille (born 1939), American drummer.

³⁰ Re-released on CD: Basel: Hat Hut Records, 2006.

³¹ *Johnny Mbizo Dyani, African Bass, Solo Concert, Willisau Jazz Festival 1978* (Gatefold), a recording by Swiss Radio DRS.

³² Zim Ngqawana (1959–2011), South African tenor saxophonist, flautist and percussionist.

³³ William Parker (born 1952), American bassist.

³⁴ Matthew Shipp (born 1960), American pianist.

³⁵ Nasheet Waits (born 1971), American drummer.

in South Africa, but he died two years after his sensational performance in Willisau, the only one he gave there.

In 1990, we were planning a big evening for 14 June, a “South African Jazz Night”³⁶ with a group formed around Dudu Pukwana called “South African Friends”, featuring Thomas Dyani and Ernest Mothle, and then Chris McGregor and the Brotherhood of Breath. But Chris died about two weeks before the concert. Roland Perrin³⁷ was already playing the piano for Dudu’s ensemble, and he now also played the tour with the Brotherhood, “in honour of Chris”, so to speak. Barbara Pukwana was also there. But Dudu seemed so tired and weak, I was really worried about him. There’s a photograph of the event where you can see how sick he was, how weak he looked – and yet he was otherwise such an energetic man. He really wanted to play and made such an effort. He played both concerts, but died too just two weeks later. It was so tragic.

SR: Barbara Pukwana told us that he died on 28 June 1990 in hospital.

NT: And that was after Chris had died two weeks before our concert! But to end our conversation on a more positive note: I recently heard a beautiful concert very close to here, in Sursee. The tenor saxophonist Marcel Lüscher played a programme exclusively with pieces by Dollar Brand at the Sursee Jazzcafé³⁸ together with its “resident trio” of Peter Estermann (piano), Rafael Jerjen (bass) and Raphael Woll (drums). It was wonderful, wonderful!

³⁶ See www.willisaujazzarchive.ch/concerts/1990/1295.html (accessed January 2025).

³⁷ Roland Perrin, composer & pianist, born in New York, today living and teaching in London. See www.lccm.org.uk/about-us/our-tutors/music/roland-perrin/ (accessed November 2024).

³⁸ This concert took place on 23 September 2024. See <https://stadtcafe.ch/kultur/jazzcafe-40> (accessed November 2024).

STEPHANUS MULLER AND CHRIS WALTON (EDS)

**Cultural Relations between Switzerland
and Apartheid South Africa**

Basler Afrika Bibliographien 2025

The open access version of this book has been published with the support of the Swiss National Science Foundation.



Hochschule der Künste Bern
Haute école des arts de Berne
Bern Academy of the Arts

2025

Published by

Basler Afrika Bibliographien

Namibia Resource Centre & Southern Africa Library

Klosterberg 23

PO Box

4010 Basel

Switzerland

www.baslerafrika.ch



The Basler Afrika Bibliographien is part of the Carl Schlettwein Foundation

Text © The authors 2025

Cover image: Niklaus Troxler's 1994 poster for the Willisau Jazz Festival. Courtesy of Niklaus Troxler

Cover design: Candice Turvey, Spiritlevel

ISBN 978-3-906927-74-9

eISBN 978-3-906927-75-6

<https://doi.org/10.53202/LHFY9620>



This work is licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>.

Contents

The Authors	ix
--------------------------	----

Introduction

<i>Chris Walton & Stephanus Muller</i>	xiii
--	------

Part I: Historical Foundations and Early Encounters 1

1 Tracing the Paths of Culture between Switzerland and South Africa <i>Chris Walton</i>	4
2 A Nineteenth-Century Swiss Missionary Encounter with Sesotho Orthography <i>Lineo Segoete</i>	32
3 Vignettes from the Travels of Things: A Cultural Biography of Objects in the Hans Adler Collection <i>Annemie Stimie Behr</i>	44
4 Compact Urbanity in Contrast: Revisiting Civic Centres Designed by the Kirchhofer Office in Apartheid-Era South Africa <i>Thomas Chapman</i>	61

Part II: Music, Theatre and Performance as Cultural Exchange 77

5 Deon van der Walt (1958–2005), a South African Tenor in Zurich <i>Hilde Roos</i>	80
6 South African Youth Orchestras in Switzerland <i>Chris Walton</i>	88
7 Listening to South African Apartheid on Swiss Radio: Athol Fugard's <i>The Blood Knot</i> and the Translation of Passing <i>Franziska Burger</i>	102
8 A Theatre Scandal in the Swiss Provinces: Fugard's <i>Statements</i> in St. Gallen <i>Franziska Burger</i>	115

Part III: Literature, Exile, and Intellectual Dialogues 129

9 Peter Sulzer and the Conservative Representation of South African Literature
to a German-Speaking Readership, 1948–1994
Jasper Walgrave 133

10 Swiss Literature in Afrikaans between 1948 and 1994: An Overview
Paula Fourie 153

11 Lewis Nkosi and Switzerland: Provincialising the Global North
Astrid Starck-Adler & Dag Henrichsen 165

12 “Coloured nature... isn’t that easy to shake off”: Gordon Jephthas in Switzerland
Féroll-Jon Davids 174

13 Shalati Khosa’s Swiss Sojourn
Chatradari Devroop 183

14 Singing Cowboys and Alpine Goat Herds: The Passaggio of Culture to Nature in
Afrikaans Yodelling
Willemien Froneman & Stephanus Muller 191

Part IV: Jazz 205

15 When South African Jazz Came to Switzerland: Abdullah Ibrahim (Dollar Brand),
Chris McGregor and the Blue Notes, Joe Malinga and other South African Jazz
Musicians, the Anti-Apartheid Movement and “AfriKaribik” in St. Gallen
Richard Butz 209

16 Dollar Brand in Zurich – Taking Notes
Bruno Spoerri 230

17 Harmonies of Foreign Climes
Steff Rohrbach 238

18 Abdullah Ibrahim in Ichertswil: An Interview with Six Trutt
Christian Steulet/Steff Rohrbach 243

19 Interview with Rose Ntshoko
Steff Rohrbach 254

20	Interview with Bob Degen	
	<i>Steff Rohrbach</i>	263
21	Interview with Stephan Kurmann	
	<i>Steff Rohrbach</i>	269
22	“Jazz against Apartheid”: An Interview with Jürgen Leinhos	
	<i>Steff Rohrbach</i>	278
23	Interview with Barbara Pukwana	
	<i>Christian Steulet/Steff Rohrbach</i>	290
24	Interview with John Wolf Brennan	
	<i>Christian Steulet, ed. Steff Rohrbach</i>	298
25	Interview with Niklaus Troxler	
	<i>Steff Rohrbach</i>	305
	Sources	317
	Archives Consulted	318
	Bibliography	319
	Index of Names and Places	339