

6 South African Youth Orchestras in Switzerland

Chris Walton

The literature on the South African musicians who came to play in Switzerland during the apartheid era has hitherto focused on the jazz scene. This is hardly surprising, as Switzerland was for several Black South Africans an important stopping-off point on their way to international fame,¹ and remembering how Europe welcomed representatives of an oppressed people is always a more attractive proposition than remembering how it welcomed representatives of their oppressors. The adoption of Resolution 2396 by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 2 December 1968, which called for a cultural boycott of South Africa, made it increasingly problematic to invite South African artists to perform in Europe. But Switzerland did not join the UN until 2002, so still felt at liberty to ignore all calls for a cultural boycott until it was no longer expedient to do so in the 1980s.

In contrast to the likes of Dollar Brand & Co., who were unknown abroad when they moved to Europe in the early 1960s, the white South Africans who visited Switzerland to perform during the apartheid era were generally already leading musicians in their field (such as Mimi Coertse, who sang in Basel in the mid-1950s, or Deon van der Walt, who made his home in Zurich when he joined the Opera House in the mid-1980s). To the best of our knowledge, only two South African orchestras were ever invited to perform in Switzerland during these years. They were both youth orchestras, and their tale begins in a chic dental practice in central London.

The practice in question was run by one Lionel Bryer (1928–2006), who was born in Bloemfontein in South Africa, attended the local boys' school, Grey College, then studied medicine at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg before being awarded a Rhodes Scholarship to University College, Oxford, where he devoted much time to his two principal private passions: sports (he was a rugby Blue and played cricket for his col-

I am grateful to former members of the youth orchestras mentioned here for providing detailed information on their tours: to Frederick and Pieter Fourie of the Bloemfontein orchestra, and to Michael Blake, Isabel Bradley, Bernard Caplan, Ronald Gehr, Jill Richards, Paul Simmonds and Barend van den Bergh of the SABC Junior Orchestra. For reasons of discretion, I do not always specify which piece of information was provided by which former member, though I naturally have all such details in written or oral (i.e. recorded) form.

¹ See the chapters by Richard Butz, Bruno Spoerri and Steff Rohrbach/Christian Steulet in this book.

lege) and music (playing violin in his college orchestra). A research fellowship to Harvard followed, after which he returned to London to set up a dental practice in Chelsea (later moving to the exclusive Cadogan Square in Knightsbridge). He married Justine Iris Albert (known to all as “Joy”) in 1956.² Originally from Boston, she had studied at the Sorbonne in Paris in the late 1940s and later worked in public relations and artistic management (her company for a while even had the US comic Bob Hope on its books).³ Lionel Bryer’s practice attracted many prominent personalities, one of whom happened to be Blyth Major, the managing director of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and the founder/conductor of the Midland Youth Orchestra. Major also had knowledge of South Africa, having spent the years 1951–53 conducting the Durban Municipal Orchestra, and this no doubt provided another talking point between the two men.⁴ Major was apparently keen to take his youth orchestra on a tour to Europe; Bryer (a keen skier) suggested Switzerland. Out of this emerged the idea of organising a festival – also in Switzerland – where several youth orchestras from different countries might be brought together. Joy Bryer (whom *The Times* in its obituary described as “feisty”)⁵ seems to have played a major role in these matters right from the start, with her celebrity contacts an obvious advantage (a simple Google search will bring up photos of her smiling and hobnobbing with all manner of the rich and famous, from Herbert von Karajan to the Pope). She and her husband registered a British charity in 1969 by the name of “International Youth Foundation of Great Britain”, whose stated aim was to organise an “international festival of youth orchestras”.⁶ For its first president, they were able to get Edward Heath on board – a keen musician and former organ scholar of Balliol College, Oxford, who was at the time the leader of the opposition in the United Kingdom and was elected Prime Minister in 1970. The Bryers were very well connected: for their first-ever International Festival of Youth Orchestras, held in St. Moritz in August 1969, they engaged Leopold Stokowski and Walter Susskind to conduct, and invited eleven youth orchestras to participate: one each from the UK (Blyth Major’s Midland Youth Orchestra), Canada, Czechoslovakia, Holland, Germany, Norway and Switzerland, and four from the

² Our information on the Bryers is derived from various obituaries, e.g. Alasdair Steven, “Obituary: Joy Bryer, co-founder of the European Union Youth Orchestra”, in *The Herald*, 12 December 2018.

³ See Anon., “Orchestrating the talents of Europe’s youth”, in *Politico*, 17 April 1996, at www.politico.eu/article/orchestrating-the-talents-of-europes-youth/ (accessed October 2023).

⁴ Anon., “The Second International Festival of Youth Orchestras” (programme book for the Festival). [No place (London?)]: [no publisher], [1970], 26.

⁵ Anon., “Joy Bryer obituary”, in *The Times*, 28 November 2018.

⁶ See GLOBAL CIVIL SOCIETY DATABASE, <https://uia.org/s/or/en/1100049430> (accessed September 2023).

USA. The Festival was held in a “specially erected concert tent which seated an audience of 1,300 and had a specially designed stage and acoustic shell”.⁷

The second Festival, held the next year, was even more ambitious. Its glossy programme book reflects the elevated circles in which the Bryers moved, with messages of greeting from Edward Heath (now Prime Minister), the Swiss Federal President Hans-Peter Tschudi, the Chairman of the Swiss National Tourist Office Werner Kaempfen, and Leonard Bernstein (though he did not attend in person). Blyth Major was still involved, now appointed the official “Festival Director of Music”; his responsibilities included conducting the massed fanfares at the start of the event.

The various orchestras invited went on individual tours of Switzerland from 14 to 17 August 1970, then came together for the opening ceremony in the New Schoolhouse of St. Moritz (which had only recently been completed). Daily concerts by the individual orchestras followed, with Rudolf Schwarz the main guest conductor, and on Saturday 29 August the best musicians from all the orchestras combined for the final concert in St. Moritz, conducted by Walter Susskind and with Max Rostal and Leon Goossens as soloists (Maurice Gendron had been due to perform Haydn’s Cello Concerto in D major, but had taken ill, and that work was replaced by Arnold Cooke’s Oboe Quartet with Goossens). The following day brought a Gala Concert in the Zurich Tonhalle. This year, the nine orchestras invited came from the UK, Canada, Bulgaria, Germany, Hungary, Switzerland, the USA – and for the first time also featured an ensemble from South Africa: the Orange Free State Youth Orchestra of Bloemfontein, conducted by Jack de Wet.

This invitation to the Bloemfonteiners – just over a year after the UN had called on the world to boycott South African culture – was naturally the work of Lionel Bryer himself, who was keen to include his hometown in his new venture. Jack de Wet (1927–2018)⁸ had studied in Pretoria and Amsterdam, then played for three years in the SABC Orchestra before moving to Bloemfontein as the first violinist of the Free State String Quartet – a post that also entailed teaching his instrument at the local university. He founded the Free State Youth Orchestra in 1961, and his success as a pedagogue led to a rapid increase in his student numbers. He left the Free State String Quartet to concentrate on teaching, and by the time of his Youth Orchestra’s invitation to St. Moritz in 1970, there were up to 150 children active in the various ensembles run by de Wet in Bloemfontein. The nature of society at this time naturally meant that all those children were white, just as their schools and the University in Bloemfontein were peopled solely by white students and white teaching staff. The

⁷ Anon., “The Second International Festival of Youth Orchestras”, 11.

⁸ The biographical information on de Wet given here is largely drawn from David Bester, “Jacobus Gustavus de Wet’s contribution to violin pedagogy in South Africa”. Master thesis, University of Stellenbosch, 2016.

Youth Orchestra comprised just strings (10 first violins, 9 seconds, 6 violas, 6 cellos and one double bass).⁹ They performed on 15 August at the Fraumünster in Zurich, on 16 August in Pfäfers Church in Bad Ragaz, on 20 August in the Catholic Church of Flims-Waldhaus, on 21 August in the Gemeinde-Schulhaus in Klosters, and on 24 August in St. Moritz. Their programme each time comprised the following: Francesco Geminiani's Concerto grosso in D, op. 3 No. 1; the Concerto for Violin and Orchestra in e minor by Pietro Nardini (soloist: Jan Repko); an "Adagio K. 156" by Mozart arranged for string orchestra (presumably the second movement of the String Quartet in G major K. 156); a Sinfonietta by Hans Maske (1927–1976), a German-born South African who had studied with Arnold Bax in London, then spent much of his later career teaching at the Windhoek Hoërskool (and who published reviews in the local press under the name "Hansliek");¹⁰ Vivaldi's Concerto for Four Violins in B minor, op. 3 No. 10 (soloists: Suzanne de Villiers, Marianne Malan, Abrie de Wet and Deon Schoombie) and then Ralph Vaughan Williams's Concerto Grosso. At the Gala Concert on 30 August, the South Africans joined the youth orchestra from Zurich in playing the "Larghetto e affettuoso" and an "Allegro" (i.e. either the fourth or fifth movement) from Handel's Concerto grosso in G minor, op. 6 No. 6 under the baton of the Swiss conductor Rätö Tschupp (the remainder of the Gala Concert was given over to the orchestras from Tacoma USA and Bulgaria). It was again presumably Bryer who ensured that the orchestra from his native country participated in the final concert. According to the enthusiastic review of the concert in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (*NZZ*), two other orchestras were in the audience; the others had probably already returned home or were on their way.¹¹ It is interesting that when Bryer signed the souvenir programme book of Frederick Fourie – a fellow Grey College alumnus – he wrote his best wishes in Afrikaans.

The *NZZ* sent one of its main critics to St. Moritz in mid-August – but to attend a concert that Herbert von Karajan conducted in the New Schoolhouse at 5 p.m. on Saturday 22 August with a slimmed-down ensemble from the Berlin Philharmonic (he was also, nota bene, a resident of St. Moritz). They played a Bach programme featuring the Third Brandenburg Concerto, the A-minor Violin Concerto and the Orchestral Suite in B minor. Karajan apparently disappeared swiftly afterwards, to the chagrin of the young musicians in attendance, though he had at least arranged for them to attend free of charge, sitting in the gangways and wherever they could find a space. If the critic stayed to attend the concert by

⁹ These are the players listed in the official programme, though the number of members mentioned in the press varies. It is possible that there were late additions whose names were submitted after the programme had gone to press.

¹⁰ This biographical information is taken from Ernst van Biljon: "Die musieklewe van Windhoek vanaf 1890 tot 1971". Master thesis at the University of the Orange Free State, 1982, 276–85.

¹¹ "df.", "Fröhlicher Abschluss", in *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 408, 3 September 1970, morning edition.

the Hungarian youth orchestra in the same venue later that evening, he did not write about it afterwards – though as a rule, leading newspapers do not send their principal critics to youth orchestra concerts held outside the principal metropolitan areas. Two of the smaller dailies took the trouble to comment on the Festival, however. On 29 August, the reviewer of the *Engadiner Post* noted that the Bloemfontein orchestra demonstrated “an astonishing homogeneity and a very beautiful sound; the vigour of its music-making is astonishing, as is its creative maturity”.¹²

On 3 September, the *Neue Zürcher Nachrichten* (a Catholic newspaper that ran from 1904 to 1991) reviewed the St. Moritz performance of the Bloemfontein orchestra, noting that its members had the youngest average age (14) of any of the orchestras at the Festival, and that they achieved “Erstaunliches” (“astonishing [results]”; “erstaunlich” was also the word used by the *Engadiner Post* above). The reviewer praised the state support that the orchestra clearly received, while mentioning in passing that “on the other hand, [our] democratic principles mean we cannot approve of a selection principle that has been driven to extremes” (a rather convoluted, roundabout way of regretting that the orchestra was completely white).¹³ This is the only public criticism we have been able to find about the presence of a white South African orchestra at the Festival, though it still prompted a response. A week later, a letter to the editor from a “W.M.” in Zurich was published that in a manner hardly less convoluted took exception to the reviewer’s objections, writing that “it has very little to do with any extreme selection principle if young people come together who all have a talent for music ... and especially if they bring much joy and idealism when they play together”.¹⁴ Two days later, the same newspaper brought a long report on the Festival in general, though without going into many specifics.¹⁵

The fact that no fewer than five out of Bloemfontein’s 32 players were selected to perform in the international orchestra for the final concert in St. Moritz (a decision seemingly made by the musical powers-that-be at the Festival, not by Bryer for reasons of national solidarity) suggests that their standards were indeed high (these were the orchestra’s leader, Suzanne de Villiers, her sister Louise, Francois Henkins, and the brothers Frederick and Pienaar Fourie). Given the pedagogical success of Jack de Wet throughout his career (he was for several decades one of South Africa’s most renowned violin teachers), this should not

¹² “gf.”, “St. Moritz. 2. Internationales Jugendorchester-Festival 1970”, in *Engadiner Post*, 77(99), 29 August 1970.

¹³ “G”, “Gültige Leistungen am Jugendorchester-Festival”, in *Neue Zürcher Nachrichten*, 66(205), 3 September 1970.

¹⁴ W.M., “Musikförderung in der Schule”, in *Neue Zürcher Nachrichten*, 66(213), 12 September 1970.

¹⁵ Anon., “Impressionen rund um das Zweite internat. Jugendorchesterfestival”, in *Neue Zürcher Nachrichten*, 66(207), 5 September 1970.

surprise us. What's more, Suzanne de Villiers was chosen to play the first violin in Arnold Cooke's Oboe Quartet in the final concert in St. Moritz and was also named the best young violinist at the Festival alongside the Bulgarian Mira Vladimirova. They were both awarded a scholarship to study for a year with Max Rostal in Bern. De Villiers (the granddaughter of M.L. de Villiers, the composer of the South African national anthem *Die Stem*, as one report expressly mentioned)¹⁶ was just one of several members of the Bloemfontein orchestra who later pursued a career in music. In this she was joined by Abrie de Wet, Pienaar Fourie, Albie van Schalkwyk, Juergen Schwietering and Jan Repko.

The parents of the children involved had to find a considerable sum to cover their travel costs, which the newspapers of the day stated to be ZAR 23,000 in total (thus roughly CHF 115,000 at the then exchange rate). The provincial administration of the Orange Free State donated ZAR 5,000 to the tour fund, and while we have been unable to determine the precise amount owed by the family of each travelling member, it was presumably into three figures, which was a very large sum in rands at the time¹⁷ (we should recall that the rand was still very strong, worth roughly 5 Swiss francs). Frederick Fourie (whose parents also had to fund his brother Pienaar) recalls his father getting sponsorship from Bradlows, a furniture company in Bloemfontein (Bradlows was Jewish-owned, and Fourie's father had extensive contacts in the Jewish community; he had even visited Israel to study irrigation techniques and their possible application in South Africa). Fourie still recalls the bewilderment of the South Africans when they first saw a city on a lakeside – Zurich – for none of them had been outside South Africa before. They were also astonished when they arrived at Klosters for their concert and a local band of about a dozen people came to the platform to play for them in greeting as their train pulled in. There was even a butcher among them, playing in the band, still with his apron on. Fourie never forgot the impression of how music could seemingly be part of the natural fabric of a community.



Figure 6.1. Members of the Bloemfontein Youth Orchestra in 1970. Courtesy of Frederick Fourie.

¹⁶ Joe Sack, "Free State Orchestra triumphs in Europe", in *Opus*, New Series, 2(1), 16–18, here 18.

¹⁷ Anon., "Jeugorkes kry R5000", *Volksblad*, 8 August 1970.

One of the orchestras present at the Festival was the District of Columbia Youth Orchestra from Washington D.C. (hereinafter DCYO), which the Bloemfonteinners today recall as being largely Black, and which the South African press described as “the predominantly Negro District of Columbia Youth Orchestra”,¹⁸ though in fact it was clearly a multi-racial ensemble, judging from the extant photo of its concert in St. Moritz.¹⁹ According to the reminiscences of the South Africans, the DCYO arrived at Zurich Airport at the same time as them, though the two ensembles were kept apart (whether those in charge were aware of the irony of this apart-ness remains moot). The South Africans heard rumours that members of the DCYO wanted to protest at the presence of a South African orchestra and prevent it from performing, so they were uneasy when a large contingent of the DCYO sat at the back of the hall for their St. Moritz concert on 24 August. However, the South Africans recall that Jack de Wet appeared on the conductor’s podium wearing a large emblem of the DCYO, which was apparently taken as a gesture of good faith, and no protests were forthcoming. Several of the Bloemfontein members were even invited to the DCYO’s farewell party at the end of the Festival – though they were taken aback at the copious amounts of alcohol being imbibed and at what seemed to the South Africans to be overt demonstrations of drunken lasciviousness among its members. (Regrettably, my efforts to contact the DCYO to try and ascertain their members’ perspective of the tour have remained without any response, while our efforts to locate surviving alumni using the DCYO’s online lists have proven fruitless).²⁰

In 1971, the Festival moved to the Théâtre de Beaulieu in Lausanne, whose 1,600 seats made it far bigger than anything that St. Moritz could offer (it still markets itself today as “the largest theatre in Switzerland”).²¹ Czechoslovakia, England, Norway, Singapore, Switzerland and the USA were the countries represented. Lausanne remained the chosen venue the next year, 1972, when the Festival began branching out: the invitees included two orchestras from the USA plus one each from Australia, Canada, France, Holland, Japan, Yugoslavia, the UK and South Africa (the Johannesburg-based Junior Orchestra of the South African Broadcasting Corporation), then two choirs (from Japan and Switzerland) and two ballet companies (the University of Cape Town Ballet School from South Africa and the

¹⁸ Undated, untitled clipping from an English-language South African newspaper (though obviously from 1971) in the archives of Frederick Fourie.

¹⁹ The only photo we have found of the DCYO in St. Moritz in 1970 is here: www.dcyop.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/1970-DCYO-in-Switzerland-1024x707.jpg (accessed September 2023).

²⁰ I emailed the address given on the DCYO website (www.dcyop.org/) and did an extensive Google search for alumni of 1970 listed at www.dcyop.org/alumni/alumni-list/. When it finally seemed as if I had located one such alumnus, it turned out that he was suffering from major health problems, had caught Covid just a week earlier, was in an ICU, and was unlikely to re-emerge. I decided not to trouble his family by contacting them.

²¹ See <https://beaulieu-lausanne.com/en/theatre-de-beaulieu/> (accessed October 2023).

Boston Dance Theatre School from the USA). The glossy programme again featured greetings from Edward Heath and the Swiss President (who was now Nello Celio), but they were joined this time by Leonor F. Loree II, the Vice-Chairman of Worldwide Banking at the Chase Manhattan Bank, whose Foundation had now become a major sponsor of the Festival (the Bryers were clearly very good at networking; according to a report in the *Neue Zürcher Nachrichten*, the Bank donated USD 25,000).²² Loree was given two full pages to wax lyrical about the charitable achievements of the Bank, and his little essay was illustrated by a large photo of happy, smiling Black children in a play area funded by the Bank in a former “debris-ridden vacant lot” in Brooklyn.²³

The 1972 Festival opened on 24 July 1972 (again with massed fanfares conducted by Blyth Major) and offered daily concerts up to and including the Gala Concert of 6 August, which was held – as in 1970 – in the Zurich Tonhalle. And as the previous time, the various ensembles toured Switzerland before and after the Festival proper. The UCT Ballet School performed at the Théâtre municipal in Annecy on Tuesday 25 July (thus just across the border in France) and in the Lausanne Theatre on Friday 4 August. The School had been founded in 1934 by Dulcie Howes (1908–1993) and was a rarity in South Africa in that it had long allowed a small number of “coloured” dancers to train over the years, the most famous of them being Johaar Mosaval (1928–2023), who had moved to the United Kingdom and joined the Sadler’s Wells Ballet in 1952. And the ensemble that flew to Switzerland in 1972 included at least three members who were officially classified as coloured – two dancers and its director at the time, David Poole (1925–1991). To be more precise, Poole was a formerly coloured person. He had grown up in District Six and had trained at the UCT Ballet School before moving to England to work. He was fair skinned, and when he returned to South Africa in 1959 he had himself classified officially as “white”.²⁴ He succeeded his former teacher Dulcie Howes as the head of the UCT Ballet School in 1969, and by all accounts made concerted efforts to improve the chances of his fellow coloureds on the Cape Town dance scene²⁵ (we contacted UCT’s Centre for Theatre, Dance & Performance Studies, today’s successor to the Ballet School, in an effort to gain further information on its Lausanne tour and on Poole’s policy towards coloureds, but regrettably met with no response). Poole was also responsible for the choreography of the first item on the School’s touring

²² Sda, “Internationales Jugendorchester- Festival in Lausanne”, in *Neue Zürcher Nachrichten*, 67(172), 26 July 1972.

²³ Anon., “The Fourth International Festival of Youth Orchestras” (programme book for the 1972 Festival). Bourne (Lincolnshire): [no publisher], [1972], 29.

²⁴ See Hilde Roos, *The La Traviata Affair. Opera in the age of apartheid*. Oakland CA: University of California Press, 2018, 11.

²⁵ Communication from Hilde Roos, October 2023.

programme in 1972, namely *Cirque*, which was danced to Bach's *Orchestral Suite No. 3* in D major, BWV 1068. This was followed by *Peter and the Wolf* to Prokofiev's music, choreographed by Frank Staff, and then *Fiesta Manchega* to (taped) music by Jacinto Guerrero, choreographed by Marina Keet.



Figure 6.2. The SABC Junior Orchestra in Lausanne, 1972. Courtesy of Paul Simmonds.

First row from bottom, from left to right: David Kohn, Leonard Pietjou, Stephanus Jooste, Nico Jansen van Rensburg, Linda Quayle, Julianne Fitchett (leader), Walter Mony (conductor), Harold Taswell (SA Ambassador to the UN), Mrs Taswell, Ockert Botha (general manager), Neville Dove (piano soloist), Annette Emdon, Otten Gabler, Isabel Hand, Ann Mony (chaperone), Willie Burger (chaperone).

Second row, f.l.t.r.: Jeanne Burger, Cornelia Vermaas, Elsabe Lamprecht, Bruna Cazzolato, Brenda Isakoff, Bernarda Vorster, Jill Richards, Wilhelmina Vermaas, Gerrit Eikenaar, Hazel Sibson-Walker, Ronald Gehr, Colin Iverson, Gertruda Bodenstien, Vivienne Wood, Konstanze-Marie Ahlers, Brigitte Bremer, Inge Redinger, Catherine Germiquet, Maureen Rosenburg, Marietjie van Drimmelen, Loret van Zyl, Desiree Bonfiglio, Ursula Sinovich, Wilbert de Roo.

Third row, f.l.t.r.: Colleen Nero, Noeleen Pienaar, Robert Buning, Raymond Sargent, Christopher Neeves, Richard Thomas, Pieter Venter, Charles Drake, Maria Hartman, Dolf Schutte, Jan Louw, Floris Coetzee, Cecily Dixon, Janine Griffiths, Marie Mendalow, Louis Johnston, Annalie Ahlers, Mywfanny Cotton, Hans Vonk, Johannes Grobelaar, Fiona McKeller, Peter Jaspan, Louis Hirschorn, Alistair McDonald.

Top row, f.l.t.r.: Heine Toerien (radio correspondent), Peter Rohner, Francois le Roux Malherbe, Bernard Caplan, Izak van der Walt, Heinz Bauer, Tertia van Emmenis, Anna van Niekerk, Barend van den Bergh, Paul Simmonds, Colin Hartley, Michael Blake.

The SABC Junior Orchestra left Jan Smuts Airport in Johannesburg on 19 July 1972 and gave its first concert in Rapperswil on 21 July, its second in Broc (in Canton Fribourg, near Lake Gruyère) on 29 July, and then moved to Lausanne to perform at the Festival proper on Monday 31 July. Their programme was: a Concert Overture in D by the South African composer Gideon Fagan (1904–1980), a Concerto in E for Double Orchestra by Johann Christian Bach (presumably his Symphony in E major op. 18 No. 5 for double orchestra), Camille Saint-Saëns's Second Piano Concerto (soloist: Neville Dove), Malcolm Arnold's *Four Cornish Dances*, and Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet Overture*.

Given the plethora of concerts on offer, it is again unsurprising that the South Africans did not feature much in the national press, with *Die Tat* (a politically centrist daily) the only exception, which on 12 August published a review of the Festival by one Walter Gyssling. He offered high praise for the orchestra from Brisbane, but then also added that the concert by the SABC Junior Orchestra was “worthy of mention, the highlight of which was the performance of the Piano Concerto in G minor by Saint-Saëns by the pianist Neville Dove, who displayed technical virtuosity and remarkable artistic ability, and who is only 20 years old”. Gyssling found Fagan's Overture “quite pleasing”, but didn't like the Malcolm Arnold.²⁶ He also wrote briefly about the Lausanne performance of the UCT Ballet School, describing it as “an evening aimed wholly at merriment” that was “executed excellently” – though he said more about the Ballet School's international contacts than about its actual dancers (stressing Dulcie Howes's sometime career in Anna Pavlova's company and the success of its choreographer alumnus John Cranko).

The SABC Junior Orchestra's concert in Broc – a picturesque but out-of-the-way place – prompted articles in the local press. The Fribourg newspaper *La Liberté* in fact brought two articles, both on the same page – a general overview that offered little except to confirm that the exotic foreigners found Switzerland “very nice”,²⁷ and then an actual review of the concert itself that praised the orchestra's “brilliant” performance. Fagan's Overture did not appeal much – the reviewer stated merely that it “at least served to get the orchestra going” – and they also noted certain imprecisions in Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet*. But it was Neville Dove who was again “the highlight of the evening” thanks to the “precision and sobriety of his playing. He managed to introduce enough of his personality to prove that, for him, technique does not necessarily take precedence over interpretation”.²⁸ One G.G. also reviewed the concert in Broc, finding Fagan “an endearing neo-Romantic, though perhaps a little backward [attardé]”, once more being impressed most by the Saint-Saëns, in which

²⁶ Walter Gyssling, “Musizierende Jugend aus fünf Erdteilen”, in *Die Tat*, 12 August 1972.

²⁷ M.Fl. (presumably Michel-R. Flechtner; see below), “A la découverte de la Suisse”, in *La Liberté*, 31 July 1972.

²⁸ Bf, “Le S.A.B.C.: Junior Orchestra de Johannesburg à Broc”, in *La Liberté*, 31 July 1972.

Dove “dazzled the audience with his mastery and panache, playing expressively in every one of his solo passages. This promising talent was then greeted with a standing ovation”.²⁹

After the close of the Festival, one Michel Flechtner offered an overview in *La Liberté*, declaring it “without any doubt a success”. Of the soloists, he singled out Neville Dove and Marja Bon as the best (the latter having played Willem Pijper’s Piano Concerto with the Youth Symphony Orchestra of Amsterdam). Of the two ballet companies at the Festival, he gave the most praise to the South Africans, judging their evening “a great success”. He also praised several of the orchestras, then added: “technically speaking, the Youth Orchestra of South African Radio was not on the level of ensembles such as those of Pittsburgh, Milwaukee or the Netherlands, but *Romeo and Juliet* and the Second Piano Concerto by C. Saint-Saëns were performed with great musicality”.³⁰

The SABC Junior Orchestra had been founded in the mid-1960s jointly by Anton Hartman, the apartheid functionary and Broederbond member who was Head of Music at the SABC throughout that decade, and Walter Mony (1929–2009), the Orchestra’s conductor. He was a Canadian-born violinist and violist who had studied at the Royal College of Music in London, had moved to South Africa in his 30s, and was later appointed to the staff of the Music Department of the University of the Witwatersrand (hereinafter “Wits”). The Junior Orchestra provided a training ground for Mony’s own students, their peers from the University of Pretoria, and talented instrumentalists from the region who had not yet left high school. We do not know how the invitation to Lausanne came about, though it probably came from Bryer via Hartman.

The SABC Junior Orchestra, like that of Bloemfontein, was naturally all-white. But it, too, had many talented musicians in its ranks who later became prominent on the music scene.³¹ Neville Dove studied at the Juilliard School in New York and embarked on an international career as a pianist and conductor. The orchestra members on the Swiss tour in 1972 who later pursued music included Paul Simmonds (double bass), who later specialised in the clavichord and harpsichord, moved to Switzerland, and won the German “Preis der Schallplattenkritik” in 1997; Michael Blake (also double bass) became a composer, emigrating to England to avoid military service, then returning to South Africa in the 1990s to found the country’s national section of the International Society of Contemporary Music; Jill Richards (flute) has for many years been one of South Africa’s best-known pianists, especially for contemporary music, and has worked closely with Kevin Volans; and Annette Emdon and Robert Buning (both percussion) later sat for many years on the board of SAMRO, the music rights organisation of South Africa.

²⁹ GG, “Musique d’été sur la scène brocoise”, in *La Gruyère*, 1 August 1972.

³⁰ Michel-R. Flechtner, “Où sont les limites de ces musiciens?”, in *La Liberté*, 12–13 August 1972.

³¹ The orchestra’s alumnus who is surely best known today had in fact left it a year or so before the Swiss tour: the composer Kevin Volans.

Although the Junior Orchestra was all-white at a time when anti-Black, anti-communist propaganda was actively supported by the South African authorities, this should not lead us to suppose that any kind of “white solidarity” was the norm among its members, not even in an informal setting in which all the participants were supposedly bound together by a love of music. In fact – thus the reminiscences of those involved – the orchestra was clearly divided into two groups, with the Afrikaans-speaking students from the University of Pretoria (at the time a completely Afrikaans-speaking institution) and the English-speaking students of Wits associating little with each other, neither in rehearsal breaks in Joburg nor when they went on tour to Switzerland (one English-speaking participant even used the word “hostility” to describe relations between the two factions. It seems that not even teenage hormones were enough to bridge the entrenched culture gap between them). Nor did the orchestra stand out in Switzerland for being completely white, for the same applied to most of the other orchestras, with the exception of a youth orchestra from Pittsburgh, which had a few Black members. One of the South African girls present can still recall her astonishment at the time that the Black Americans did not speak any African languages, but conversed in English instead – proof enough, she admits today, of how successful had been the indoctrination to which she and her peers had been subjected in South Africa.

While the Afrikaners and the English-speakers apparently did not mix much, the tour otherwise seems to have been perfectly convivial. One member recalls a reception at Rapperswil at which an abundance of local wine caused the inebriation of certain accompanying staff. They also remember a particular parent having somehow procured a free ticket as a chaperone, but who disappeared after Rapperswil in order to enjoy a Swiss holiday on his own, turning up again just in time for the flight back home (we have been regrettably unable to cross-check this information or get the other side of the story). Otherwise, the tour was marked by the usual teenage friendships, crushes and occasional disappointments. One of the English-speaking South Africans apparently caused a stir among her Afrikaner peers by demonstratively hugging Black musicians from the Pittsburgh orchestra (the effect was naturally intentional, and all part of the English/Afrikaner inter-orchestral tensions). One of the South African girls went to the movies with a few friends she’d made from other orchestras, and took a particular liking to a young, curly-haired percussionist from the Merseyside Orchestra by the name of Simon Rattle.

As in the case of the Bloemfontein orchestra two years before, the costs of participating were considerable. The South African authorities again provided a certain amount of subsidy (we are not aware in this case of just how much), but the families of the members had to find ZAR 200 per child (presumably a similar amount to the costs incurred by the Bloemfonteiners). That was a large amount at the time (equivalent to CHF 1,000 at the then

exchange rate). In one respect, however, the trip of the SABC Youth Orchestra was different from that of its Bloemfontein predecessor. The latter was a string orchestra and had chosen its programme accordingly. The SABC Orchestra, in contrast, was determined to present a full symphonic programme. The problem was that they didn't have enough brass players, who accordingly had to be sourced from elsewhere (Arnold's *Cornish Dances*, for example, feature a tuba solo, an instrument lacking in the orchestra at the time). Mony found the players he needed in the South African Correctional Services Band. All young South African white men had to do a year's military service at the time (it was later increased to two years), though it was possible to opt to join the prison service instead of one of the branches of the military. Musicians were also fortunate in having the option of avoiding direct participation in the border wars by joining a band. Each of the different forces had its own band, and this was also the case with the Correctional Services, whose band was based in Kroonstad, some two hours by car from Johannesburg. With the help of the SABC (presumably through Anton Hartman, who had excellent connections to the government), the Band released several of its conscripts so they could join the tour.

Apart from being the home to the band, Kroonstad Prison was notorious for holding political prisoners, especially Black women. Those incarcerated at the time of the SABC Junior Orchestra's tour included Dorothy Nomzansi Nyembe and Amina Desai; later prisoners in Kroonstad included Thandi Modise, Sibongile Mkhabela, Caesarina Makhoere (who later wrote a book about her experiences entitled *No Child's Play: In Prison Under Apartheid*)³² and Winnie Mandela, who was sent to Kroonstad in 1975. Information on conditions at Kroonstad Prison nevertheless remains patchy, especially for the early 1970s.³³ Volume Four of the multi-volume report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission contains harrowing testimony of the degradation and abuse suffered by Black women prisoners under the apartheid regime, but the prisons where this happened are hardly ever named³⁴ (one implicit sign of the paucity of information on Kroonstad is to be found at the close of the brief article on it on the longstanding website South African History Online, whose "Further Reading" at the time of writing includes a link to Booking.com's accommodation offerings

³² London: Women's Press, 1988.

³³ Besides Makhoere's memoir (see above), the following offer some information (though not very much) on Kroonstad and the women held there: Cherry Clayton, "Post-colonial, Post-apartheid, Postfeminist: Family and State in Prison Narratives by South African Women", in *Kunapipi*, 13(1), 1991, 136–44; Kalpana Hiralal, "Narratives and testimonies of women detainees in the anti-apartheid struggle", in *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, 29(4), 2015, 34–44; and N.P.Z. Mbatha, "Narratives of women detained in the Kroonstad Prison during the apartheid era: A socio-political exploration, 1960–1990", in *Journal for Contemporary History*, 43(1), 2018, 91–110.

³⁴ See Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa, *Report* vol. 4, especially 314–17, available at www.justice.gov.za/trc/report/index.htm (accessed June 2025).

in the town).³⁵ To the best of our knowledge, the (male) conscripts in the Kroonstad band were not involved in any activities at the women's prison, where the warders as a rule were women. Nevertheless, their participation in the tour of the SABC Junior Orchestra underlines the close connections between the SABC and the authorities, and thereby the implicit propaganda value of a tour to Switzerland, an important trading partner as yet uninvolved in the UN boycotts. It seems that not even a youth orchestra in South Africa was able to function properly without the aid of the apartheid-era military structures.

The International Festival of Youth Orchestras left Switzerland for good after the 1972 Festival in Lausanne, moving in 1973 to Aberdeen in Scotland where it remained for several years. In 1975, another invitation to South Africa was issued, this time to Eoan, the coloured amateur opera company of Cape Town, despite the fact that most of its members were no longer "youths". They gave concerts in Aberdeen at the Festival itself and in London, where they were joined by a former member, Gordon Jephtas, who had left South Africa several years earlier and was enjoying a successful career as a *répétiteur* at the Zurich Opera House. He offered several coaching sessions to Eoan's singers in London before he returned to Switzerland and the Eoan members left for South Africa.³⁶

The SABC Junior Orchestra seems to have gone on just one more international tour: in 1981. But since the unrest in Soweto in 1976, the international boycott had spread to most of the Western world, and almost no one wanted anything openly to do with South Africa. So the SABC had to be satisfied with an invitation from one of its fascist brother nations in the fight against international communism: Paraguay – which had been ruled for almost thirty years by Alfredo Stroessner. The tour also included stops in Argentina (then at the height of its "Dirty War") and Uruguay (also still under military rule). And this time, the propaganda aspect of the event was explicit – even the Paraguayan defence minister attended a reception for the orchestra.³⁷

As for the Bryers: they left the International Festival of Youth Orchestras behind and instead decided to set up a youth orchestra of their own. This was the European Union Youth Orchestra, which they founded together with Claudio Abbado in 1976. The full story of how the European Union's flagship youth ensemble was set up by a boycott-busting South African dentist from Bloemfontein is one that is still to be told.

³⁵ See anon., "Kroonstad", at www.sahistory.org.za/place/kroonstad (accessed October 2023).

³⁶ Roos, *The La Traviata Affair*, 210, and Roos, Davids and Chris Walton (eds.), "Sorry. I am what I am." *The life and letters of the South African pianist and opera coach Gordon Jephtas (1943–92)*, especially 153–54, 160–61. See also the chapter by F.-J. Davids in this book.

³⁷ See the SABC documentary "SABC Junior Orchestra 1981 South American tour" at www.youtube.com/watch?v=i_Qlu-0Guas (accessed October 2023).

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.



H K B

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 |