

From Cosmopolitanism to Cosmology and Back Again: The Emergence of a Practice-Centred South African Jazz Collective, 2020-2022

The extended public humanities and practice-centred collaboration that has come to be called the Cosmopolitan Collective initially emerged out of an ARA-supported artist residency exploring the theme of jazz cosmopolitanism in Africa by means of performance. Recognizing the diverse manifestations of jazz-related expression across Africa and its diaspora, the project set out to enable dialogue and direct collaboration between some of its contemporary protagonists.

Though the planned residency was thwarted by the global pandemic lockdowns of March 2020, as the pandemic dragged on, it brought the imperative to reconceive this pan-African exchange. This led to the artistic team in the Wits School of Arts convening online listening and study sessions to engage with the recordings and films of the Anyaa Arts Kollektif from Accra, Ghana, and to formulate a response in the form of a recorded concert that could be live-streamed and sent to our intended visitors. The outcome was what came to be billed as the Cosmology Concert in the Wits Theatre, featuring lecturers, students and alumni of the Music Department in the Wits School of Arts (WSOA), as well as a couple of professional musician-researchers who had long expressed interest. The performance was live-streamed by a class of WSOA Film & TV students under the guidance of a lecturer focusing on filming live performance. And the physical event as well as its online presentation were organised by the School's Festival Study Group, an international network convened by a PhD candidate in the School who had become an associate of the Dept. of Cultural Policy and Management.

To this already broadly collaborative group across the School of Arts, perhaps the most distinctive additional constituency was added: members of Mamelodi's jazz appreciation community attended under carefully socially distanced conditions as a potentially participating live audience. When that potential to actively participate was realised, primarily through their distinct practice of solo improvised jazz dance (*diga*), the results were transformative for the musicians and general public in attendance and online.

In the immediate aftermath of the Cosmology concert, these community partners elected to form a new collaborative structure called the Cosmopolitan Collective to build on the potential that the Cosmology concert had demonstrated for role players who usually operate separately to work together to sustain community-based jazz gatherings, expression and research. The collective has become a unique, experimental, and developing collaboration between various role-players within community-based jazz circles around Tshwane / Pretoria and their networks around and beyond Gauteng. It brings together like-minded jazz collectors and appreciators, dancers, musicians and heritage activists with educational institutions within and beyond township settings to innovate new ways of working together to sustain grassroots jazz cultures.

This panel will feature participants involved in planning the original residency, the Cosmology Concert of October 2020, and the ongoing series of community and campus-based concerts between then and September 2022.

Panellists:

1. **Brett Pyper**, Associate Professor in WSOA, conceiver of the project, and Deputy Chairperson of the Cosmopolitan Collective
2. **Kgomotso Moshugi**, Postdoctoral Fellow in WSOA, co-researcher of musical cosmopolitanism, vocal arranger of the Cosmology Concert and musical director of subsequent projects
3. **Munyaradzi Chatikobo**, PhD, Head of the Cultural Policy & Management Department in WSOA and host of the Cosmopolitan Collective's 2022 residency in the dept.
4. **Lakin Morgan Baatjies**, MA candidate in the Cultural Policy & Management Department in WSOA researching audience development in the Cosmopolitan Collective's work
5. **Oladele Ayorinde**, WSOA PhD graduate, researcher of economic ethnomusicology, and convenor of the Festival Study Group that co-presented the Cosmology Concert
6. **Representatives of the Cosmopolitan Collective**

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