

## Covers, Copies, and “Colo[u]redness”<sup>1</sup> in Postwar Cape Town

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To copy [note] for [note], word for word, image for image, is to make the known world your own ... It is within an exuberant world of copies that we arrive at our experience of reality.

*Hillel Schwartz 1996, 211-2*

Despite their prodigious use of recordings in formulating perspectives on jazz history, historians have tended to avoid theorizing the actual status and function of these artifacts—the very artifacts that ... would seem to constitute primary evidence about jazz music.

*Jed Rasula 1995, 134*

There was a time when radio was pure magic...the magic [came] from entering a world of sound, and from using that sound to make your own vision, your own dream, your own world.

*Susan Douglas 1999, 28*

Just to sit in this dark place, and magic takes place on the wall. For a moment, we forgot apartheid, we forgot there was another world that wasn't good; we sat there, and were carried away by the dream of these American movies.

*Actor John Kani to Peter Davis 1990, 23*

On January 25, 1959, a short but rather glowing review appeared in *The Golden City Post*, one of South Africa's most popular newspapers targeted at a “non-white”<sup>2</sup> audience. It read:

There is no doubt about it, Beatrice Benjamin is the mostest, the greatest and the most appealing girl singer in the Cape, whispers Howard Lawrence. What she did to the audience at Post's show, “Just Jazz Meets the Ballet” was wow. I got it bad when she sang “I Got It Bad.” Everybody else got it bad too and they kept shouting for *more of that feeling*. Most promising singer for 1959. Agreed. [my emphasis]

Five decades later the performance of Duke Ellington's music in Cape Town, South Africa may not seem particularly noteworthy. In its historical moment, however, it was a remarkable achievement for a local singer of mixed race to move her interracial audience emotionally with a “foreign” repertory, i.e., a style of song performance far removed from the site of the music's original production. It begs the question of how jazz had become both a naturalized discourse in Cape Town and part of the individual

and collective experiences of so many who lived through that period of South African cultural and political history. For this Cape Town-born singer, “I Got It Bad and That Ain’t Good” has a certain aura. Sathima Bea Benjamin<sup>3</sup> recalls that this Duke Ellington tune created an immediate and steadfast bond between herself and internationally acclaimed South African jazz pianist Abdullah Ibrahim (aka. Dollar Brand).<sup>4</sup> Benjamin and Ibrahim were each working separately on the piece when they first met at the jazz fundraiser mentioned above. Unbeknownst to them in 1959, through an extraordinary sequence of events, they would come to meet and record with Duke Ellington and his musical partner, composer-performer Billy Strayhorn in Switzerland four years later. Benjamin and Ibrahim memorialized that encounter by performing “I Got It Bad” once again, but this time in the presence of its composer.

Two records came out of the 1963 encounter, one featuring Sathima Bea Benjamin (*A Morning in Paris*, 1997) and the other Dollar Brand, (*Duke Ellington Presents the Dollar Brand Trio*, 1963, reissued 1997). These records signified a climactic moment for South African jazz because while many South African musicians had performed the music of Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn in Johannesburg and Cape Town, few imagined they would ever have the opportunity to meet these musicians, or witness them performing live, let alone record in the presence of such internationally acclaimed artists. As the Cape Town jazz pianist Henry February commented to me, at that time for people in

his community, travel to America was like travel to the moon. “The only experience I ever had with Americans was through records.”<sup>5</sup> Similarly, when South Africans began to travel in Europe in the 1960s and 1970s, they report that they rarely met anyone abroad who had any knowledge of South Africa’s vibrant jazz communities.<sup>6</sup>

In this paper, one of a series of meditations on postwar performance amongst people classified as “Colo[u]red,” I examine the media through which ordinary people like Sathima Bea Benjamin, Abdullah Ibrahim, and their peers learned American popular music and jazz performance in the port city of Cape Town. The materials derive from a long-term research project I have been conducting with Ms. Benjamin since the early 1990s. While much of that project is concerned with the auto/biographical details of her life and music, including a move into cultural and later political exile initially in Europe and ultimately in New York City, this paper takes a more generalized approach to musical practices in Cape Town, South Africa from the end of World War II to the early 1960s. Although the musicians I have interviewed were all somehow connected to Ms. Benjamin at the time, I have integrated additional primary sources, including discussion of archival film and newspaper material, to enhance and enlarge upon the ethnographic particularity.

Ms. Benjamin and her peers in 1940s and 1950s Cape Town initially honed their musical skills by taking cover in the imported sounds of American (and to some extent British) popular music and

big band jazz performance. These styles came to the port city through a range of personal contacts with visiting American sailors, occasional tours by English and American musicians,<sup>7</sup> but more profoundly through the importation of Anglo-American entertainment media and technology, specifically radio programs and commercials, sound recordings, and Hollywood films. Without the opportunities for formal musical training, South Africans absorbed and listened closely to the recordings, copying and covering them live in local venues, creating what some in South Africa have called a culture of “carbon copies” of foreign music and musicians.<sup>8</sup> Dovetailing with the experiences of a small group of men, who drew on their recent experience as wartime entertainers to train young musicians in the new repertory, many in Postwar South Africa had come to believe in European classical and American popular music as universal languages, languages that could be both understood and mastered.

Postwar South Africa must also be characterized as a period of growing anomaly. On the one hand, there were several “collaborative” musical projects between English-speaking liberal whites, people of mixed race, and African descent. These included production of the films *The Magic Garden* (1951) and *Jim Comes to Joburg/ African Jim* (1949), *Song of Africa* (1951), *Zonk!* (1950) (see Davis 1996), the continued (state) support of the Eoan Opera Company<sup>9</sup> for “Colo[u]red” youth in Cape Town, and the organization of traveling performance troupes like *The Arthur Klugman Show* (or *Coloured Jazz and Variety*), *African Jazz and*

*Variety* (changed to *African Follies*), *Township Jazz*, *Golden City Dixies*, and *King Kong: An African Musical Opera*. Even though they were heavily loaded towards white direction of “non-White” talent and there was, for example, little “African” in *African Jazz and Variety* other than black bodies performing, such initiatives surely signaled a measure of hope in some for racial or at least cultural integration in the future. For many who participated in their performances, they also held the promise (though usually not the realization) of international travel, particularly to England and Europe. On the other hand, for those of African and mixed racial descent like Abdullah Ibrahim and Sathima Bea Benjamin, it was an era of increasing state surveillance and exclusion in which the scaffolding of apartheid was legislated if not yet fully enforced by the Afrikaner Nationalist government. The political climate changed dramatically with the Sharpeville Massacre in March 1960 in which the National Security forces opened fire on black protesters, killing several.

In other words, in contrast to this period in the USA, which may have started out completely segregated but was slowly transformed, at least legally, through the Civil Rights Movement, by the early 1960s the outcome in South Africa was legalized apartheid enforced with draconian measures. “Colo[u]red” and other forms of African<sup>10</sup> racial classification became increasingly problematic especially in urban areas like Cape Town and Johannesburg. The ideas and sounds of middle class respectability expressed in “Colo[u]red” dance bands

and those of political liberation suggested in the racially mixed or ideologically non-racial membership of the small but progressive jazz avant garde contrasted with the expanding force of state control and the repression of individual and collective expression. For some the response was to engage politically, to become more outspoken; some withdrew in fear; yet others used jazz performance to articulate ideals of political and cultural freedom and racial integration.

The first part of this paper situates so-called “Colo[u]red” racial classification in the postwar era from the perspective of the musicians I have interviewed. This narrative of the complexity of “Colo[u]red” identity in Cape Town in this period suggests why at least some people in that community opened themselves up to the possibilities of new and “modern” musical sounds and practices not historically germane to the region or regarded as articulations of “South Africanness.” The second part is largely ethnographic with a focus on the participation of Ms. Benjamin and her peers in a Cape Town culture of “carbon copies” and covers from the 1940s through the 1960s. This narrative, or series of narratives, is about the transplantation of foreign mediated performance onto local culture. It tells of the translation of “American” music into a form of performance that was more culturally coherent, and one that occurred largely through live reenactments. In other words, this is a history in which objects more than people bring the sounds of jazz and popular music to communities far from the sites of first/original performance. People posturing as “Cape

Town’s own” Frank Sinatra, Doris Day, or Bing Crosby brought these traditions to life. “Enlivening” distant voices on stage by using local singers and instrumentalists was a common practice for white musicians in the South African record industry i.e., studios produced foreign music under license using the voices of locally known performers.<sup>11</sup>

In the third part, I reflect on the metacultural practice of creating “carbon copies” of recordings of foreign musical performances in postwar Cape Town by people labeled “Colo[u]red.” While the “culture of the copy” is not peculiar to the twentieth century or to South Africans in Cape Town (cf. Schwartz 1996), it assumes particular characteristics in the postwar period depending first on the ways in which originals were heard through different media—film, radio, and sound recordings—and then repeated or re-presented in the Cape; second, on how fertile the musician’s imagination was in determining his/her capacity to take on and reshape the social and musical self through copying the voices, gestures, and clothing of the objectified performances of “American” others; and third, how mediated originals were copied (transcribed/memorized, or performed) by local musicians. In this context, Cape copies sustained two broad kinds of performances: exact copies of foreign models with/without some improvisation or “ad libbing,” and the more intellectual and politically progressive world of the Cape jazz avant garde that strove for creative, original expressions in a non-racial social milieu. It was the latter performance that troubled the Afrikaner Nationalist gov-

ernment because it countered ideologies of racial purity and separate cultural development.

### “Cape Colo[u]red” as Racial Classification

It would be a grave error not to provide some understanding of the deeply embedded sense of place that Cape Town’s residents, regardless of racial category, historically attributed to that city. Cape Town is a place of exquisite beauty. Its physical landscape, with Table Mountain in the center, and the Indian and Atlantic oceans surrounding it, has long provided for its residents a specific sense of locality. This was true for people of African and mixed racial heritage until about 1950. Within the space of about twelve years, 1950-1962, the “Mother City” changed from one which evoked a profound sense of place, home, and community belonging, to a space of exclusion, fragmentation, boundary marking, and inevitable transgression. It was certainly true for Ms. Benjamin and all the others who participated in Cape Town’s avant-garde jazz community. These changes were inflicted on those labeled “Cape Colo[u]reds” by a series of laws made by the Afrikaner Nationalist government in the early 1950s for the country at large. They had a particular kind of impact in Cape Town because this legislation intentionally sought to keep people categorized as “Colo[u]red” out of white space. State enforcement of these laws played a critical role in the transformation and often destruction of these communities, and of jazz performance itself.

To talk about “Colo[u]redness” in Cape Town is therefore extremely prob-

lematic. This complexity was poignantly exemplified, for example, in the results of the first democratic elections in South Africa in 1994 when to the surprise of many, the majority of people categorized as “Colo[u]red” voted the Afrikaner Nationalists back into power in the Western Cape, defeating the bid of the more politically progressive African National Congress. “Colo[u]red” is thus a label fraught with ambiguity because, like the notion of *metissage* elsewhere,<sup>12</sup> to be labeled “Colo[u]red” in South Africa has never translated into a positive form of identification. Though the label itself gained currency in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century in Cape Town the “Colo[u]red” label was ascribed to those who were originally slaves but who had sexual relations with Europeans in a period of greater freedom in interracial social relationships (February 1983). It is worth noting in this context that slavery in the Cape was not limited to people of African descent because many slaves were imported to Cape Town from places along the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century Dutch trade routes: Malaysia, Indonesia, Madagascar, Ceylon, and Bengal (Western 1996, 12-13). Unlike some of those of African descent in the US, many “Cape Colo[u]red” people had largely participated in European- rather than African-derived cultural practices.<sup>13</sup> Under the apartheid government, however, all people of mixed racial heritage or married to someone who was mixed, were legally required to identify themselves as “Colo[u]red” regardless of their cultural orientation. In other words, the category of “Colo[u]red” became an ideological and political rather than a “natural” or cultural one.

Early twentieth century Cape Town has been described by Ms. Benjamin as a period of “relaxed apartheid,” when people of color mixed with those of European descent though always in quite controlled frames. Social restraint not only characterized social convention for “Colo[u]red” people once the Afrikaner Nationalists came to power in 1948; it had also been an effective strategy under British governance prior to that. For example, it was under the British that “Cape Colo[u]reds” were removed from the Common Voters’ Roll in 1936. Sathima recalls that two social principles were inculcated into her as a child of mixed race in that period: (a) know your place and (b) do not look for trouble. Culturally, the social rules were transferred into “Colo[u]red” dance band performance in which adventurous musicians were held to a stringent set of rules about permissible “deviations” from performance conventions. Jazz musicians like Henry February and Abdullah Ibrahim have provided humorous accounts of their attempts to improvise over set tunes and fixed rhythms in the dance band contexts (see further Layne 1995 for discussion of these two styles of performance).

Without the right to vote equally with whites, the Afrikaner Nationalist government proceeded to separate “Cape Colo[u]reds” socially from Europeans (the label for “Whites”) through a series of legislative acts starting in 1950. This was their strategy of “nation”-building: of forging a “nation” of European peoples at the center with all “others” geographically, economically, and politically marginal. The 1950 Population Reg-

istration Act (amended in 1966) created legal definitions for racial groups, defining “Colo[u]reds” as persons not native or European, or persons married to a man or woman *classified* as “Colo[u]red” (Western 1996, 9). The Immorality Act (passed in 1927 and amended in 1950 to include a ban on interracial marriages) made all sexual relationships across what was called the color bar illegal. The Group Areas Act (1950) required racial groups to live in specific areas, seeking to separate out the “Colo[u]reds” from “Europeans” to preclude any further racial mixing in Cape Town specifically (though it had wider ramifications in the rest of the country as well). The Separate Amenities Act (1950) forced racial segregation in all public venues.<sup>14</sup> So the naming of “Colo[u]reds” legally became a means to divide, rule, and marginalize rather than to unite and empower.

The racial category “Colo[u]red” is therefore a label of ethnicity that has never represented any kind of homogeneous group in South Africa, except in the eyes of the apartheid regime. I have specifically chosen not to use the word “identity” in the Cape Town context because few of those classified as “Colo[u]red” identify with the category. Some reluctantly accept it publicly but privately resent its application to them. Some have rejected it entirely. A few have sought to “pass” for white. Many never use the word “Colo[u]red” without the preface “so-called,” because this kind of racial categorization underpinned the apartheid government’s policy of racial purity, the denial of European participation in biological miscegenation, and exclusion of people labeled “Colo[u]red”

from the larger nation-building project of the Afrikaner Nationalists. “Colo[u]red” intellectuals, some of whom were also members of the South African Teachers’ League, completely rejected social identification through racial categories, projecting instead ideals of a non-racial democracy (February 1983). In this instance, people prefer to be identified individually, and in terms of categories other than race. Some use the label “Colo[u]red” to assert their difference from people of African descent. Others preferred to be identified as African.<sup>15</sup> More recently “Colo[u]red” identification has also been re-appropriated by some for political and economic mobilization and gain.

Sathima Bea Benjamin’s own family heritage adds a new twist to the question of being labeled “Cape Colo[u]red” because they were never “Cape Colo[u]reds” in the historical sense of the term. Half her family<sup>16</sup> hailed from the remote Atlantic Ocean Island of St. Helena ruled by the British. Sathima’s father, Edward Benjamin’s family, had immigrated to Cape Town from St. Helena in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when his older sister, also named Beattie, was a young girl. The Benjamin family arrived on boats in the Cape Town harbor and settled with other St. Helenians. This group of immigrants lived in three places in the city: District Six before its destruction, the Rondebosch-Claremont suburbs (on the “Colo[u]red” side of the railroad tracks), where Sathima spent her early childhood, and Athlone, a more settled “Colo[u]red” area where she lived in her late teens and early twenties with her mother.<sup>17</sup> Many St. Helenians of

Sathima’s father’s generation kept themselves apart from others of mixed race who were called “Cape Colo[u]red.” Unlike some “Cape Colo[u]reds” who spoke Afrikaans, who were part of the working class or variably employed, and who danced to Afrikaans-derived live band music (called “langarm,” the “long-arm” style of the tango) on weekends, St. Helenians aspired to participation in a milieu of English language middle class cosmopolitanism and “respectability.”<sup>18</sup> Some never took South African citizenship but remained British subjects, engaging exclusively with the English-speaking world. Certainly, most St. Helenians in South Africa were proud that, prior to 1948, their birth certificates stated, of “mixed St. Helenian” rather than “Cape Colo[u]red” descent. On weekends, this community gathered the extended family to play cards and sing around the piano. Most were church-going Christians. This would change with the next generation, which sought to assimilate more into South African society, but they were forced to identify themselves as “Cape Colo[u]red” from the late 1940s.

In addition to policies of exclusion from South African citizenship and nationhood, instituted by the Nationalist government from the early 1950s, “culture” was used to demarcate differences on the basis of race and class. The European classical tradition signaled good taste and middle class membership for the “Colo[u]red” (and African) elite. Nationally it was the standard by which musical talent and excellence were evaluated. The distaste for jazz amongst the “Colo[u]red” elite is expressed as follows:

When the child has been allowed to cultivate a soul we shall find a new illumination in the remaining cultural subjects, for he will be able to respond to the works of great masters of creative spirits [i.e., European masters], music will not need to be rendered to jazz nor the sensuous, and literature to vulgarity, before he can find genuine pleasure in them.<sup>19</sup>

Most of the musicians I have interviewed who were situated on the proverbial fence between working class and an emergent professional membership of the middle class had little music education. Sathima went for some piano and theory lessons, as did Henry February and Jimmy Adams. Even if you could afford the tuition, training in European classical music and syncopation were the only two styles available, so it was more common for “Colo[u]red” musicians to be self-taught. Big band arranger Jimmy Adams recalls borrowing tuition books from his teacher. On the back of one of these manuals he found there was the “United States School of Music” in Washington D.C. that offered training through correspondence. By combining superior aural skills with a close listening to borrowed recordings, Adams taught himself jazz harmony and arrangement from the books he ordered from America.<sup>20</sup>

Contrasting with the peculiarities of local experiences, it would seem from the films shown in Cape Town cinemas and sound recordings sold in the city’s stores that jazz, particularly as dance band accompaniment but also as avant-garde artistic performance, were the sites through which people of color were negotiating a fair and respectable place for

themselves in the United States in the 1940s and 50s. The increased availability of sound recordings and films in the postwar period added to the more usual sheet music, enabling individuals to learn the repertory by listening rather than reading the score, which corresponded more closely with the particular skills available to most in this community at the time. In this section, I shift focus to Sathima, or Bea Benjamin as she was known in Cape Town, and her musical peers’ responses to foreign sounds in their home environment in these years. I shall discuss three mediated sources: radio, sound recordings, and film, and round off the ethnographic materials with selected examples of “enlivened” repetitions and representations of this music in Cape Town through the early 1960s.

### Radio

When I asked veteran Cape musicians, Jimmy Adams and Harold Jephtah, where they first heard American music, they replied, “It was in the air.” Jimmy qualified, “In the air, on the radio.”<sup>21</sup> Initially there was only the English language station, then an Afrikaans language and culture station was developed, and a third, called the Klipheuvel Station, aired for several years and then shut down. In 1950 the first semi-commercial radio station, Springbok Radio, was made available through state controlled broadcasting. Henry February explained that his move from English style syncopation to American jazz on piano occurred after he heard the Benny Goodman Trio with pianist Teddy Wilson on radio. The piano playing “hit



[him] like a thunderbolt.” In response, February who had had some piano lessons, purchased books that taught the Teddy Wilson style. Later he heard the music of Nat King Cole. He taught himself how to play in the Cole style, and in the 1950s called his jazz ensemble the Nat King Cole Trio.<sup>22</sup>

Born a few years after Adams, Sathima recalls that as a young girl she absorbed American popular music and jazz through listening to her grandmother’s radio, which played daily in their home. From the age of about ten she used to keep a pen and notebook hidden in her grandmother’s wind-up gramophone. The notebook was hidden because her grandmother did not think the young girl should be wasting her time writing down the words in order to perform them on stage, at intermission in the cinema, and later in clubs and at jazz gatherings. To hear the musical sounds as background music was safe; to memorize the words, to transform them into your own texts, was troublesome because the public nature of dance band and stage performance was not considered appropriate for respectable young girls, especially not those from the St. Helenian community. Nevertheless, because she could not afford to buy the sheet music, sound recordings, or fake-books, Bea Benjamin painstakingly copied the words of tunes as they were broadcast repeatedly through the week. Once she heard a song at the movies or on the radio, she would take ownership of its melody by repeated listening. Through this medium young Bea listened to English and American popular music and big band jazz per-

formed by artists like Duke Ellington, Nat King Cole, Ella Fitzgerald, Doris Day, Joni James, Frank Sinatra, Billie Holiday, and many others.<sup>23</sup>

### Film

While the radio broadcasts were an integral aspect of the everyday chores in Bea Benjamin’s childhood, the cinema proved to be the social space that brought the most complete package of the magic of faraway people and places close to home. In contrast, Jimmy Adams rarely visited the “bioscope” (movie theater),<sup>24</sup> and Henry February does not consider the movie fare influential on his development as a jazz pianist—the audiences were looking for images, not good artistic sounds.<sup>25</sup> Harold Jephtah, however, recalls attending the theater two or three times a week in his youth.<sup>26</sup> As diverse as the acts in the live variety shows that preceded film screening in theaters, a night at the local movie theater included two full-length feature films (usually “Wild Westerns,” action, or monster films), a serial, the news, and a cartoon. Jephtah’s favorite serial was “Terry and the Pirates,” but the monster movies were his passion. It is to his avid viewing of those movies that Jephtah attributes his desire to learn the European orchestral repertory<sup>27</sup>—prompting Jephtah to train as a classical clarinetist and bassoon player in Sweden in the early 1960s.

In the 1940s, when the young Ms. Benjamin and her friends began viewing American movies, the theater offered more than mere consumption of audiovisual images. For these young Cape teenagers and aspiring performers, Hol-

lywood films provided clearer models of popular performance, largely by people of European descent. There were, nonetheless, one or two films that stand out in South African film history because they starred people of color. *Cabin in the Sky*, starring Lena Horne as singer and Duke Ellington as band leader, and *Stormy Weather*, featuring a range of African American jazz performers and variety entertainers, were two of the most popular movies shown to “non-white” audiences in South Africa in the mid-1940s.<sup>28</sup> These two films were the cinematic models for the handful of local productions, live and filmed, of the 1940s and 1950s in which largely black South African performers in Johannesburg starred. There were other films in which performers like Billie Holiday, Cab Calloway, and the Ink Spots appeared (Davis 1996). Furthermore, in the increasingly repressive public environment, the “bioscope” theater was the only space that allowed a measure of freedom in social (and romantic) interaction between young “Cape Colo[u]reds” in Cape Town in the 1940s and 1950s. There were no other contexts in which, for example, “Colo[u]red” girls were permitted to appear publicly without their parents. With its mix of reality and fictional material, the program at the theater, much like television in the United States and Britain in the same period, kept the community in touch with the outside world. The darkness of the cinema allowed audiences to sit back, open their eyes to an otherwise inaccessible world of glamor and enchantment, or to keep them closed and to dream.

South African historians Nasson

(1989) and Jeppie (1990) both argue that “going to the movies” was a ritualized, often boisterous, communal activity in Cape Town’s “dream palaces” in the mid-1940s through to the late 1950s. Nasson explains:

The local “bioscope” occupied a very special niche in the recreational life of the community, a place to which both adults and children went in order to be cocooned in the dream world of the flickering screen. Attendance was regular and habitual, as films continually widened their audience appeal and imaginative power to transport people out of themselves, and the humdrum confines of their work and domestic lives at least once a week...While [cinemas] tended to be fairly small and unpretentious in appearance, their names—the Star, the West End, the Empire, the British Bioscope—dripped with the promise of glamour or old imperial splendor. (Nasson 1989, 286-7)

Shamiel Jeppie summarizes the experiences as follows:

Sitting in often-crowded cinemas and on hard benches was a common experience for many of these cinema-goers. From these packed seats audiences would frequently audibly engage with the film; as one letter to a local newspaper put it:

I refer mostly to the talking aloud and passing comments on the players, besides reading aloud subtitles ... and the sympathy and advise [sic] given out to players by some persons. Some ladies again, bring their babies to the show in the evening.<sup>29</sup>

Amorous couples, and sporadic fights in the plebeian cinemas added to the texture of the Cape Town bioscope. Moreover there were the scenes of the audience bringing their snacks with them—from smelly fish and chips to milk chocolates. (Jeppie 1990, 120)

Hollywood films with mostly white actors and stars provided the bulk of the entertainment for these largely working class communities: westerns, thrillers, and horror movies were the favorites for men and boys, while women preferred the musicals and “weepies” as they were called (Nasson 1989). It was the bioscope that promised the fantasy and magical sounds that so many “Colo[u]red” people aspired to copy. Sathima recalls that every Saturday for seven or eight years, she would make the trip to the weekly *matinée* to get her “big dollop of American culture.”<sup>30</sup>

Retrospectively, Sathima Bea Benjamin suggests there were three levels on which American and British films shaped her individually and musically. She identified with child stars of the movies, and recalls that her aunt even braided her hair in the style of girl stars of the period. Film culture inculcated a particular notion of romance and romantic love, that even if she was never to really find it in daily relationships, she could express desire for in song. For the young Benjamin, the emotional force of romantic love she witnessed in the realistic images of the cinema was enhanced by the rich sounds of film melodies.<sup>31</sup> Many of these old tunes remain archived in Sathima’s memory, and are an integral to her current performance reper-

tory. She reinvents these “straight” melodies with a jazz sensibility that enables her to reflect temporal displacement and imaginative play as musical attributes.

### Sound Recordings

Though Bea Benjamin could not afford to buy 78 discs of her favorite performers, three of her jazz colleagues tell wonderful stories of the impact of film and sound recordings on local culture. Jimmy Adams recalled the influence of sound recordings on black South African musicians from a trip he made to Johannesburg with Sathima, after the sponsor of the their show, Arthur Klugman, abandoned the performers while on a tour of Southern Africa in the late 1950s. Adams and Benjamin ventured into the Bantu Men’s Social Center, a mission initiated community center that sponsored musical training and performances of jazz and classical music by African musicians in this period. Distributed around the walls of one of the rooms at the center were “holes in the wall with phonograph players inside. Musicians were sitting in front of the holes, listening to the records and copying the sounds.”<sup>32</sup>

Jazz musician and community librarian, Vincent Kolbe, explained that in his youth musicians did not just play exact renditions of the music they heard in the cinema or on these discs. They also drew on the images on record covers to construct hair and clothing styles.

If you were “Cape Town’s Dizzy Gillespie,” you took the album cover of Gillespie to the barber and had the appropriate haircut, and then you

went to the tailor who would cut you an outfit that duplicated what you could see on the album cover.<sup>33</sup>

During the mid-1950s Kolbe worked at the public library in Kew Town, where Sathima was living with her mother. The community was largely a generation of “Colo[u]red” men who had participated in World War II, and their children were aspiring artists, teachers, and musicians. At Kolbe’s initiative, this group of “bohemian” artists listened to recordings of jazz and discussed African American literature that emerged out of experiences of segregation in the United States. Harold Jephtah, one of Cape Town’s best-known Charlie Parker soloists in the late 1950s, recalls that he would use whatever means necessary to buy the latest 78 record of his favorite musicians. “I lived in the record shop!” laughed Jephtah. He remembers as a young boy telling his mother that he had a toothache. She provided money for a visit to the dentist. Scheming Harry proceeded directly to the record store and returned home with a Coleman Hawkins record.<sup>34</sup>

In contrast to Kolbe and Jephtah, Jimmy Adams refused to buy any recordings. He feared that if he owned the records he would listen to them too closely, and lose a sense of his own sound and musical identity. This did not stop him, however, from regularly borrowing the recordings purchased by Jephtah in order to shape his sense of the American jazz available in Cape Town. Anxiety about a loss of individual voice is exemplified in the following anecdote. Adams tells of having once borrowed a Lee Konitz recording of “All the Things You

Are.” After listening very carefully, he transcribed the music he heard, exactly. When he gave the arrangements to the musicians in his band, they told him the music sounded like Lee Konitz. In desperation, Adams responded, “But when are you going to hear Jimmy Adams?”<sup>35</sup>

In her late teens and early twenties it was through the record collections of the local library and that of Swiss entrepreneur and friend Paul Meyer that Bea Benjamin listened closely to the world of American blues and jazz in the late 1950s, though the cost of hearing was high. Meyer lived in the elite, politically liberal coastal suburb of Camps Bay in which Ms. Benjamin, now classified as “Cape Colo[u]red,” was only allowed to stay if she had a permit to work as a housemaid. To her family’s chagrin, Meyer would take the young woman on the back of his motorcycle from Athlone, where Bea was living with her mother, to Camps Bay to hear his records. Both feared being arrested for breaking laws pertaining to racial segregation, like the Group Areas Act. But, Sathima recalls, she was so desperate to hear this music that she was willing to take the risk. Several years after she began singing in public, it was Billie Holiday’s voice, heard on record in the backyard of one of Cape Town’s most elite neighborhoods, that made this young woman realize her own sound held a place in the world of jazz.

### **From Hearing to Performing**

From the 1940s through 1960s, young South Africans heard and performed live music in Cape Town in several interrelated contexts. These included perfor-

mance at home, singing in the church and at school, live music on the streets, live and mediated musical performances in Bob<sup>36</sup> parties and the cinema/“bioscope,” and the live dance band sounds of teenage Bop clubs. In this Cape Town realm of popular culture, a song first heard in a movie on a Saturday afternoon, for example, was reinforced through repeated hearing in the following week. It could be heard over the air, on record, and performed live in a cover version by local dance bands or in subsequent talent contests held at the cinema or at fundraising events organized in various churches and community halls. This community of aspiring musicians thus absorbed the sounds and images of the imported, largely American-mediated culture through what seemed to be a completely natural process of total immersion, of secondary orality, and then reproduced these performances as an integral part of local culture in the Cape.

Cape Town’s “Colo[u]red” movie audiences supported a longstanding tradition of live and mediated experience inside the walls of the theater. Audience members recall singing along with popular songs that accompanied “Tom and Jerry” cartoons, for example. At the time the words and music would appear on the screen, encouraging collective participation (Nasson 1989). “Just a Song at Twilight,” a tune Ms. Benjamin vividly remembers from her childhood, was one of these songs. Many local theaters also staged elaborate live variety acts and hosted talent competitions between movies. Sathima recalls those events as ones in which one could watch the

“originals” in their cinematic representation, and then have live versions of the models impersonated on stage at intermission.

Cape Tonians are very good at imitating. Excellent. We always had the Cape Town Jerry Lewis, the Cape Town Bing Crosby. I think for a while I was either Doris Day or Joni James, before I went into the other thing [i.e., jazz].<sup>37</sup>

Bea Benjamin first appeared in public as a singer when she was about eleven years old. She entered a Talent Contest held one Saturday afternoon at intermission and won. The prize: 8 free tickets to return her to the movies time and again. In this more popular period of her life, Sathima sang the songs of white singers Doris Day, Joni James, and others: “Mr. Wonderful” and “Somewhere over the Rainbow” were her two signature tunes. Despite singing a cover version of the song, however, Bea’s close friend Ruth Fife recalls that when she heard her at that first talent contest it was clear that even if she was using the words and melodies of others, Bea Benjamin already had her own distinctive style, a characteristic signaling the move towards jazz performance early on in her life.<sup>38</sup>

The musical content of the films provided models of performance in two other places: first, local bandleaders “borrowed” movie melodies for Saturday night dance band performances; and second, they were used for amateur performances at local hotels. In the first instance, Bea’s friend Vincent Kolbe recalls that he and a friend would be given money by one of the local bandleaders

to go and repeatedly watch the newest movie arrivals as soon as they came to the local bioscope. They were instructed to memorize the words and melodies of a song sung, for example, by Nat King Cole. Once they knew the song they would give the information to the bandleader. The next Saturday night, Cole's latest melody would be played live at social dances for the "Colo[u]red" community.<sup>39</sup> In the dance band context, the tunes were played "straight" to sustain regular rhythms required of ballroom dance. It was through these live renditions of dance band performances by musicians known in your neighborhood, rather than through the impersonal objects of sound recordings, that the majority of Cape Town's "Colo[u]red" community remembers hearing the "sounds of Hollywood."

Film melodies were also heard in local hotels and at fundraising events. Sathima's mother was a self-taught ragtime pianist.<sup>40</sup> On occasion Sathima, her mother, and her sister Joan would go to a nearby hotel where there was always a piano and a place to sing. While Eva Green could only play in the keys of C, F, and G, she knew the melodies of old songs like "Up the Lazy River," "Chicago," "Come Back To Sorrento," and "Sweet Mystery of Life." Ms. Green rarely accompanied Sathima but she would willingly work with some of the local talent. There was one man, Joey Gabriels, who sang "Come Back to Sorrento" (Gabriels changed his name to Giuseppe Gabriello when he left South Africa to study opera in Italy).<sup>41</sup> Sathima described a typical performance by the young man at a talent contest:

When the emcees would announce Joey Gabriels, they had their way, the emcees, he would come on and they would announce, he was Cape Town's Mario Lanza or Caruso or whatever, and he would walk. OK, we would all be back stage and just walk on the stage and go to the microphone (which probably wasn't working or working and making squeaks)...and there comes Joey Gabriels. He would not come from backstage. When they announced him, he came from the back of the cinema. You know, with a big chest and everything, just so pompous and full of conceit.

This was all part of the act. He'd get to the stage and walk to the middle and he would take the microphone stand and walk over to the side and put the stand down there, like I don't need this. And he'd just stand there, a gorgeous tenor, you know. It was always the same thing; people always wanted the same thing. He would just get these ovations; he was so flamboyant.<sup>42</sup>

Sathima's recollections are remarkably vivid for the forty-year time gap between original performance and its remembering. They are remarkable because through her words readers of the text can almost imagine the stage persona of Mr. Gabriels. It echoes the image one creates in the mind's eye of a similarly self-possessed Caruso or Mario Lanza. For Joey Gabriel's audiences, it was the power of his voice and the air of self-confidence he exuded on stage that called for repeat performances. It was his capacity to refashion the self in performance, but, in the eyes of his audiences,

to do it better than the movie stars. His flagrant disregard for the crutch of the voice, the technology of amplification, signaled to his audiences an improvement on the original because Cape Town’s very own Joey Gabriels had no need for the mic: the unmediated strength of his voice was sufficient. In each reenactment Joey Gabriels’s performances served to articulate membership, for the young man and his audiences in Cape Town, in a larger tradition of popular song in which they were now inextricably entwined.

Standing ovations were rather unusual amongst Cape Town’s “Colo[u]red” audiences. Sathima recalls that the community that came to hear you sing was your harshest critic. Little attention was paid to these sites of popular performance by the largely white dominated media. Rather the real critics were those of your own community. It was only when “Colo[u]red” singers and instrumentalists played in white or mixed venues (such as the venue cited at the top of the paper) that anyone in the press paid attention. Instead, community audiences provided instant feedback. If a performer was not able to measure up to their standards he or she would be booed off the stage immediately. For those deemed of adequate standard, however, the audiences were warm, alive, and supportive. They had clear aural and visual templates of the sounds and sights they desired from other live renditions and recorded versions, and performers were expected to meet them.

### Expanding Political Consciousness

In the late 1950s participation in this vibrant musical community began to be accompanied by individual reading amongst a few of the more intellectually oriented musicians and artists. For example, Sathima remembers that while she was still teaching school, she would spend her evenings in the local library where her friend and jazz performer Vincent Kolbe was librarian. She read about “Negro”/colored experience and listened to jazz recordings as part of a Jazz Appreciation Club. Kolbe recalled that the library was the hub of social and artistic activity—he described the community as “bohemian,” with several sensitive, artistic but politically conscious schoolteachers in its midst.<sup>43</sup> It was at this library that Sathima and others began to really listen to African Americans playing jazz, and to read the writings of African Americans in the United States. Kolbe provided her with books by Richard Wright, Langston Hughes, W.E.B. du Bois, and others. She found the autobiography of Billie Holiday, *Lady Sings The Blues: The Searing Autobiography of an American Musical Legend* (1956), before the book was banned in South Africa.

As a woman now classified as “Colo[u]red” it is clear that Sathima read the texts in particular ways. First, she recalls that in these books authors like W.E.B. du Bois and Richard Wright would use the racial categories of “Negro” and “colored” interchangeably. With black South Africans and “Colo[u]reds” all lumped into the category of “non-European” this was not unusual for South African readers. What was peculiar however was the way in

which Sathima recalls identifying with the word “colored” though she did not necessarily sense a connection with the word “Negro.” It does seem that, prior to the Afrikaner Nationalist Population Registration Act (1950) in which “Colo[u]red” became a separate racial category, there was a similar kind of ambiguity in the minds of people of mixed race in South Africa. This is demonstrated in a newspaper article published in Cape Town in 1936 about the visit of Paul Robeson’s wife to the city. Reporting on Ms. Robeson’s speech to a “non-white” audience it reads:

“Too often,” said Mrs. Robeson, “we have that inferiority complex, and although gifted in many ways, a *Coloured* man never feels quite certain of himself.” ... She said that she felt so at home that the meeting might have been a *Negro* one anywhere in the USA or in England. She said that she had promised her husband that she would not discuss politics on her present tour, but she would nevertheless like to say something on the fault of the *Coloured* race. “Too often we have that inferiority complex.” [my emphasis]<sup>44</sup>

Presumably quoting Ms. Robeson directly, the Cape journalist plays with the same ambiguities in racial categories that one finds in the literature of Du Bois and Wright, though the writer spells the word “Coloured” as it was spelled in South Africa, localizing the identification.

Second, it seems to me that texts were read much like South Africans read the Bible, not as historically situated, but as

texts that contained eternal truths and might have application to your life. In other words, these books on the African-American experience were not read as history so much as a kind of testimony to experiences of racism elsewhere in the world. As was the case elsewhere in South Africa, the introduction of literacy and mission activity are closely intertwined, and much “Colo[u]red” education lay in the hands of missionaries and church schools. The consequence of this kind of approach to reading is that individuals may well identify with the experiences articulated in the book, but not necessarily take note of the specific historical period elsewhere in the world in which these books were written or consumed.

In addition to reading, listening, and meeting with this library-centered community, Sathima was introduced to the small community of jazz musicians operating in the Cape. The late 1950s was the time when she began to question her identity, a process correlated with her definitive move into the music produced by people called “colored” in the United States. It was at this moment the young woman began experimenting with the music of Ellington and met Dollar Brand. By reading of the experience of a people often called “colored” in the United States, Sathima concluded that she and her people were not alone in their experiences of the harshness of racism, and that other “Colo[u]red” people were making music in a similar style, i.e., hers was both an ideological and musical/aural identification. Jazz was the more inclusive musical language that both Sathima and Abdullah hoped would be



the passport to a transnational family of like-minded musicians. It was in this period that she self-consciously moved away from copying the voices of white women, like Joni James and Doris Day, to the more emotionally evocative “blues” sounds of African-American women like Billie Holiday. This was the moment when the young woman began to search for her own “voice” in her sound and as a composer.

### Reflections on the Cape “Culture of Carbon Copies”

In the last part of this paper I offer a series of reflections on taking cover in American music as a cultural practice amongst people classified as “Colo[u]red” in postwar Cape Town. In the spirit of the improvising musicians I am writing about, these reflections are shaped out of a playful treatment of secondary literature that suggests possibilities for interfacing with the primary materials presented. They come in three phases: first, by refracting the ethnographic material through other writings on the subject of covers and copies; second, by honing in on the specific nature of this culture metaphorized in the scribal image of “carbon copies,” and a culture shaped by ongoing practices of oral transmission into which disembodied musical products were inserted and imaginatively reconstituted to cohere with local histories, characters, and sensibilities; and third, by situating struggles for individual and group identity in the tensions created by an increasingly repressive social environment with the sense of possibility conveyed by the popular media.

Pico Iyer’s quintessentially post-modern text *Video Night in Kathmandu* (1989), a narrative on his travels in the tourist zones of the “not-so-far-East,” provides a first site for refraction. Specifically, it is his tale of the culture of copies of American popular music in the Philippines that suggests the most pertinent companion to the Cape story. Reading Iyer’s chapter one is tempted to dismiss the Cape culture of copies as just that, only a copy, lacking originality, authenticity, and an emotional vocabulary of its own in the way that Iyer implies is the case with Filipinos in Manila. Iyer remains, however, a travel writer operating in the world of tourism.<sup>45</sup>

A more textured reading of the culture of the copy comes in Michael Taussig’s (1993) reflections on a cinematic scene invoking a moment at the end of the Second World War. Taussig reads the encounters of the “Third” world with “First World” technologies of repetition and its music by focusing on the ironies of such engagement. Critiquing the West’s loss of a cultural memory of its own initial intrigue with the mysteries of mechanical reproduction through the display of “frontier rituals of technological supremacy,” Taussig reminds the reader of one consequence of the African “other” appropriating European sound recording specifically. He comments on a moment in Senegalese filmmaker Ousamane Sembene’s 1988 film, *The Camp at Thiaroye*, in which a black Senegalese soldier who has fought for the French in World War II awaits discharge. In the waiting period, Sembene portrays the soldier with his favorite possession: the phonograph playing

European classical music. Taussig remarks:

On the one hand, it is pleasing to the officers to see this man becoming like them through a machine whose job it is to reproduce likeness. On the other, it is profoundly disturbing to them because this man is using this machine to manufacture likeness. Thanks in part to this machine, he is not only too comfortable with European culture, but he shows the way for a “new man” who can be both black and white, Senegalese and French. (Taussig 1993, 206)

In Taussig’s reading, there are two issues, one of technology and the other of race. On the one hand, the Senegalese man’s imitations of European-ness reveal a hollow display of technological mastery, the African man equally able to play at passive consumption albeit of a complex musical culture: the recorded European classical tradition. In so doing, he reveals and unravels the web of European power. On the other hand, it demonstrates a one-up-manship as the black man is able to code-switch culturally, performing European-ness with the same facility as he performs African-ness.

The process by which copies were made depended on the medium of transmission—radio, recording, or film—but also on access to financial resources, as well as on gender, and on what forms of cultural production were permissible by the larger community. If you owned a sound recording, you could manipulate and control when and in what context you heard its contents, though as Jimmy Adams suggests, one had to be wary of

the consequences of ownership because ownership always threatened a loss of the qualities of personal voice by transforming the bounded self into a body possessed by other voices. As the case of Jimmy Adams suggests, if you listened without owning, you could still strive to retain a sense of your own identity. Once you owned the record through purchase, however, you opened yourself to its power over your personal voice and identity.

In other words, hearing and possessing the recorded object differed from the possibilities of possession by listening to the radio as Sathima had done in her childhood. Supplementing the images and sounds absorbed in her weekly trips to the “bioscope,” the radio played all day long in the girl’s childhood home. Its words and music intermingled with household chores, and was interspersed with other activities and sounds. Never allowed to sit down and listen to the radio, Sathima’s relationship to the radio was as daily companion. Through total immersion, the melodies she heard in the cinema or live performance were supplemented with the visual images provided by the movies. She accumulated fragments of the words to create a whole text. She memorized the melodies and wrote down the words in her secret little notebook, out of her grandmother’s sight. This process of repeated listening, of partial inscription, and the accumulation of textual fragments enabled her to listen with greater accuracy. The unpredictable repetition of a song she loved enabled her to capture a few more pieces, w/o/r/d by w/o/r/d until the text was complete and she was ready to perform it in

public. This was a kind of additive hearing, a progressive habitation of the foreign repertory through copying.

The Cape capacity to imitate stars from afar by striving for faithful mimesis, to looking and sounding alike, speaks of a particular kind of repetition in cultures shaped by modern technology. And it resonates with Iyer’s reading of Filipino covers of American popular music. In this frame the mediated “original” is played and heard over and over again, relentlessly unchanging, so performers are able to present, and audiences come to expect, the perfect likeness. In the postwar era, Cape Town’s own Frank Sinatra, Doris Day, and Bing Crosby were measured by the exactness with which they could reproduce the “original” in body—how they dressed, their hairstyle, gesture; and voice. Performers aspired to, and audiences always demanded, “the same thing.” In this version of the copy, performers and audiences sought membership of a white English language cosmopolitan modernity, proving they qualified by being as good as, or better than, their European and Euro-American models.

In some respects, however, the Cape Town culture of the copy presents a contrasting case suggested by the idea of the “carbon copy.” Here, the carbon copy invokes Taussig’s two dimensions, technological mastery and ideological identifications with race, though the scriptural analogy to a musical and performative process requires further discussion. On the one hand, Hillel Schwartz’s reflections on the culture of the carbon copy as a scribal practice are insightful (1996). He suggests that in this

culture reproducing the original involves a relationship between human labor, in the s/t/r/o/k/e by s/t/r/o/k/e or w/o/r/d by w/o/r/d actions of typists and writers, and the technologies of inscription—the typewriter and sheets of carbon paper covered by individual leaflets of plain white paper. By analogy, the labor-intensive process of musical transcription, of creating a text of words and possibly tunes: making scripts for live performance is paralleled in a n/o/t/e by n/o/t/e and w/o/r/d by w/o/r/d practice. In this instance, it is the labor entailed in producing the copy that carries value.

On the other hand, the “carbon copy” is enmeshed in another kind of “master” narrative. Here, the original script, called a “master,” is transcribed as multiple copies are simultaneously [re]produced under the cover of sheets of carbon, typically in shades of black or blue. In this mode of production, copies are made out of the deep impression left by the production of a master. The master is valued as being the first, the original, while the copies are simply lesser quality replicas. This would be the view of those producing the master. From the perspective of the copies, however, the technology of carbon sheets is an enabling and more democratic one because it allows for a greater distribution of the contents of the master into multiple sites of repetition. And there is a possibly ironic twist in the choice of carbon color: black or blue. Regardless of the color of the master, the color of the copied scripts may be produced or mediated through tones of blackness or even just the blues.

The evidence suggests then that there

were several ways in which the foreign repertory was translated into the Cape Town community: first as human copies, exact renditions of the voice and repertory as the “original” represented, and you could achieve the replication by owning the recording; second, as covers, you sang the words and music of others, perhaps even wore clothes modeled on the visual representation, but your “voice” was your own because you learned the repertory by secondary orality through the radio or live performances; and third, as a springboard for your own creativity, you developed a sense of your own style using the words and music as the source for your own musical renditions. Finally, a few highly skilled individuals created musical transcriptions that people could perform from. In order to create a written transcription or arrangement one had to have a finely tuned capacity to hear, and the skills to translate sound into visual signs. Because there were no institutions that taught this kind of popular and jazz performance in Cape Town, musicians taught themselves about musical processes while transcribing the music. Their value lay in the capacity to reproduce the sound as written copy, flawlessly.

Through these four processes, individual musicians who could not read or write music inhabited the repertory through the techniques of primary and secondary orality: they taught each other, or they listened closely to the sounds on record and painstakingly made human copies. Thus “original” performances distributed into multiple sites of repetition through recorded objects enabled

“others” to imagine themselves as displaced members of the audience of these great moments. In turn each enactment was localized. In a cultural practice I call “reel to real,” American voices and sounds of the world’s greatest performers could be heard, copied, and embodied in the familiar spaces of home, club, community hall, or school.

The postwar era was, nevertheless, an historical moment of growing contradiction. While the state legislated to deny people of color citizenship in political terms, the media continued to embody a more democratic sensibility. This continued until 1960 when political and social life changed dramatically with the Sharpeville Massacre, the invention of “Bantu Radio” by the Nationalist Government, and the pervasiveness of “light” (read only European) music on commercial and state-controlled radio. Until the early 1960s, however, the American popular music and jazz commodities of the free market economy set the “standard” of performance. For these largely working class communities with a few emerging professionals, the measure of good performance was established by the imported musical objects on the one hand, and the very personal and immediate audience responses to exact copies in enlivened renditions of this music on the other. The repertory worked in South Africa because its appropriation drew on the qualities of secondary orality that local musicians already had: good listening ears, passion for the music, and a willingness to get out there and perform. Through its images and objects, “America” was perceived to hold out possibilities for, if not

the full achievement of, freedom, of racial and cultural equality. Its representations in the Cape fueled the consciousness of many performers, even if they did not consciously seek to engage politically. This was a kind of cultural democracy in action.

Through the period of intense political turbulence from the late 1950s, inner reflection, and encounters with the small community of avant garde jazz musicians in Cape Town, all of whom were experimenting with new sonic possibilities, Sathima and a few others finally moved over into the improvised and more spontaneous world of jazz performance. It is in this moment that Baudrillard’s discussion of the mirror as an object in the home provides a useful metaphor for Sathima’s relationship to the technology and mediation of foreign sounds in domestic space. Along with Baudrillard, “[w]e may say that the mirror is a symbolic object which not only reflects the characteristics of the individual but also echoes in its expansion of the historical expansion of individual consciousness” (1996, 22-23). These two elements—the capacity to reflect, to see oneself and aspects of one’s environment from a distance or from a different perspective, and the possibility of the historical expansion of consciousness through the mirror image—resonate with the way in which recordings of American jazz in particular operated for Sathima. They operated as “acoustic mirrors”<sup>46</sup> rather than as the media of carbon copies. In particular, it was after she read the life story of Billie Holiday and had heard her voice repeatedly on record that this young woman from Cape Town, South Africa knew that her

sound had a place in the transnational world of jazz. While she had probably heard the music of Billie Holiday before, it was when Sathima was in her early 20s, a time when she was self-consciously listening for a sound with which she could identify, that she heard it in the distant voice and experience of America’s own Billie Holiday. This was the moment when Sathima’s version of the copy became decidedly blue in tone and ideological position.

Ultimately, I am arguing that the imported music translated into the postwar Cape Town functioned as either a model for carbon copying or as an acoustical mirror. The first enabled Cape musicians to fashion selves modeled on others. These selves were valued locally for the ways in which they insisted on a kind of cosmopolitan citizenship, a membership of a truly imagined community of English-speaking, modern people of color. The second created a dual sense of self, you could look in/at the mirror (book or recording) and see your own image from a distance, and use that mirror image to reshape yourself in a more self-conscious fashion. This is not the culture of the copy so much as an ideological identification—through voice, instrumental performance, and body gesture—with others elsewhere in the world who had had similar experiences of the pain of institutional racism and the sense of internal exile.

### Notes

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<sup>1</sup> An explanation for the use of quotes and the insertion of [u] in "Coloured" is necessary because it speaks to the processes of cultural [mis]translation of rhetorical practices in liberation struggles for people of color in South Africa and the United States in the twentieth century. Quotation marks are used because "Colo[u]red" was an ideological tactic by the state, to racialize and create division amongst people of mixed racial heritage. Many intellectuals prefaced the term with "so-called," continually reminding their audiences of the constructed and

ideological nature of the category. I have inserted the [u] to indicate that "Coloured" didn't mean "black" but people of mixed race in this period of South African history. Prior to the rise of Afrikaner nationalists, "coloured" was a more ambiguous label, possibly parallel with its interchangeable use in writings of early 20th century African-American writers, e.g., Richard Wright and W.E.B. du Bois. However, after 1948 the state imposed the label on all those who were of mixed racial heritage or married to someone who was, i.e., anyone insufficiently white or sufficiently black African. This is discussed further in the body of the article.

<sup>2</sup> While "non-white" may seem to some to be a natural category, I have inserted the quotes to signify a rejection by many of African and mixed racial descent in South Africa of being defined in terms of an absence of whiteness. The quotes are intended to disturb fixed categories.

<sup>3</sup> Bea[trice] Benjamin changed her name to Sathima Bea Benjamin while in exile.

<sup>4</sup> "Dollar" was the nickname given to Brand to reference his exchanges with American musicians and sailors who visited Cape Town in the postwar period.

<sup>5</sup> Henry February, interview, September 1996, Cape Town.

<sup>6</sup> See other writing on South African jazz, Allen (1997), Baines (1996), Ballantine (1999 and 1993), Coplan (1985), Jeppie (1990), Layne (1995), and Molefe and Mzileni (1997).

<sup>7</sup> Touring musicians were almost always white, and there was usually some discussion about whether "Colo[u]red" people would be included in the tour program. Audiences in this period were always segregated.

<sup>8</sup> Jimmy Adams is the one who coined the phrase "carbon copies" in my interviews with musicians. Chris Ballantine (1999) simi-

larly uses the phrase in his discussion of similar practices amongst musicians of African descent largely in Johannesburg in about the same period.

<sup>9</sup> The Eoan Opera Company became extremely controversial in the 1950s because it was revealed that the Afrikaner Nationalist government was financing its operations. Such support was believed by the larger community to constitute a sell-out to apartheid ideology.

<sup>10</sup> African here refers to Bantu-speaking peoples from the continent of Africa, and is contrasted with European peoples. In the current political climate it is more usual to talk about people of European descent living in South Africa as African as well. This was not the case in the period under discussion, however. “African” might be substituted for “Black” South African. “Black” was itself a contested racial category in this period because it was argued that it reinforced the apartheid government’s privileging of racial category in social and political life (see February 1983).

<sup>11</sup> In the early 1990s South African record company Gallo Records reissued white hits from the period 1960-1990, claiming it was the time when “Local was Lekker” [Cool]. Ironically, few of the songs were locally composed, what was local was the voice of the singer, but not the song itself.

<sup>12</sup> Françoise Lionnet (1989, ch. 1) argues that the notion of *metissage*—cultural and/or racial mixing or hybridity—does not exist in the English language in a positive sense. The word translates into “half-breed” or “mixed-blood,” both of which carry negative associations. While European languages like Spanish, Portuguese, and French do have words for this kind of cultural identification, she argues that each word has very specific meanings.

The Anglo-American consciousness seems unable to accommodate mis-

cegenation positively through language. It is a serious blind spot of the English language which [sic] thus implies that persons of indeterminate “race” are freaks. It is another way of making invisible, of negating, the existence of nonwhites whose racial status remains ambiguous. (13-14)

Lionnet suggests the use of the Greek word *metis* that refers to an art of transformation and transmutation, “an aesthetics of the ruse that allows the weak to survive by escaping through duplicitous means the very system of power intent on destroying them” (18).

<sup>13</sup> Eileen Southern (1999) argues for a similar distinction in African American cultural history. According to her, differences emerged between African slaves who assimilated more European-style culture and those who retained African derived performances. The differences depended on whether slaves worked inside the houses of their masters or out in the fields.

<sup>14</sup> Each of these laws is succinctly discussed in Barker et al. 1992, 374-381.

<sup>15</sup> One of the earliest political organizations for “Colo[u]red” people called itself the African Political Organization (APO) and founded the first newspaper aimed at a “Colo[u]red” readership in May 1909 (Adhikari 1996, 1).

<sup>16</sup> Little is known about Sathima’s mother’s family heritage. Of mixed Filipino and Mauritian descent, Evelyn Henry was orphaned at a young age after her parents died in the Flu Epidemic of 1918. The young Ms. Henry was sent from her home in Kimberley to live with her mother’s sister in Cape Town where she met Edward Benjamin. Bea[trice] Benjamin was born to Edward Benjamin and Evelyn Henry in Johannesburg on October 17, 1936.

<sup>17</sup> John Samuels. Interview by author, Cape Town, September 1996.

<sup>18</sup> See Bickford-Smith, van Heyningen, and Worden 1999 (43) for a discussion of early efforts of the “Colo[u]red” elite to internalize European middle class values.

<sup>19</sup> Walker, Evelyn. 1963. *The Educational Journal* 35 (4). Cited in February 1983, 205.

<sup>20</sup> Jimmy Adams. Interview by author, Cape Town, September 1996 and December 1999.

<sup>21</sup> Jimmy Adams and Harold Jephthah. Interview by author, Cape Town, December 1999.

<sup>22</sup> Henry February. Interview by author, Cape Town, September 1996.

<sup>23</sup> Sathima Bea Benjamin. Interview by author, New York City, April 1990.

<sup>24</sup> Jimmy Adams. Interview by author, Cape Town, December 1999.

<sup>25</sup> Henry February. Interview by author, Cape Town, December 1999.

<sup>26</sup> Harold Jephthah. Interview by author, Cape Town, December 1999.

<sup>27</sup> Caryl Flinn cites film composer George Antheil’s disdain for the gap between public taste and film music composition in which Antheil scorns “Mr. Average Listener” for turning the radio dial to hear Benny Goodman or Paul Whiteman rather than listening to a symphony broadcast over the air. He continues by arguing that the best way to “emotionally condition” Mr. Average for better music is to insert orchestral performance into his “favorite movie theatre for three hours a week” by using the style in the film score. The viewer unwittingly becomes partial to the world of symphonic music (Flinn 1992, 29).

<sup>28</sup> Peter Davis (1996, 26-7) remarks that even though American movies were admired, the very rare local productions featuring African performers were extremely popular with African audiences. One example is the film *Jim Comes to Joburg*, which featured Johannesburg artists Dolly Rathebe and Daniel Adnewmah, and was shot in the streets of Johannesburg. The familiar location caused enormous excitement for black

South Africans who delighted in recognizing the streets in which their own film heroes were filmed.

<sup>29</sup> This excerpt comes from a local newspaper, *The Sun*, January 2 1948.

<sup>30</sup> Vincent Kolbe, who grew up in the more culturally diverse District Six in Cape Town’s inner city, comments that in his community Saturday night was the time for the movies. Everyone in his family would dress for the occasion. He would attend with his mother and grandmother. They would take sandwiches and a thermos of coffee for the evening. The standard fare from 7:30 to 11:30 P.M. was a comic strip, the weekly serial (the forerunner of the soap opera), a western, and a love story or musical (Vincent Kolbe. Interview by author, Cape Town, September 1996).

<sup>31</sup> Commenting on the relationship between music and emotional currency, Caryl Flinn remarks:

During the Hollywood studio era, film music was assigned a remarkably stable set of functions. It was repeatedly and systematically used to enhance emotional moments in the story line, and to establish moods and maintain continuity between scenes (1992, 13).

<sup>32</sup> Jimmy Adams. Interview by author, Cape Town, December 1999.

<sup>33</sup> Vincent Kolbe. Interview by author, Cape Town, September 1996. See also Ballantine 1999 for a discussion on this practice amongst Johannesburg musicians.

<sup>34</sup> Harold Jephthah. Interview by author, Cape Town, September 1999.

<sup>35</sup> Jimmy Adams. Interview by author, Cape Town, December 1999.

<sup>36</sup> Bob parties were like rent parties in the United States. Those who came were re-



quired to pay “one bob” (ten cents) to enter.

<sup>37</sup> Sathima Bea Benjamin. Interview by author, New York City, October 1996.

<sup>38</sup> Ruth Fife. Interview by author, Cape Town, September 1996.

<sup>39</sup> Vincent Kolbe. Interview by author, Cape Town, September 1996.

<sup>40</sup> Sathima’s mother came from Kimberley in South Africa, the site of a global influx of fortune seeking diamond prospectors in the latter part of the 19th century. This is clearly where ragtime and syncopated piano styles were heard and copied.

<sup>41</sup> Italians mixed freely in Cape Town’s District Six, the site of the most controversial form of mass removal by the apartheid government in the 1960s. Remembered now as a “Colo[u]red” community, its members hailed from all parts of Europe, and on arrival in the Cape, intermarried with local residents. These were the people later labeled “Cape Coloured” by the state. Joey Gabriel’s darker toned skin later enabled him to blend in more easily in Italy than in South Africa. Similarly, I have been told that when Frank Sinatra, also of Italian descent, appeared in public in the USA, many thought him to be too dark, to be almost “colored” when compared with lighter skinned Europeans (Jodi Billinkoff, pers.comm., April 2000, National Humanities Center, NC).

<sup>42</sup> Sathima Bea Benjamin. Interview by author, New York City, October 1996.

<sup>43</sup> Vincent Kolbe. Interview by author, Cape Town, September 1996. Vernie A. February (1983, 16) explains that the South African Teachers’ League played a critical role in shaping the political consciousness of “Colo[u]red” youth through the activist roles played by League members in the classrooms of three “Colo[u]red” high schools in Cape Town: Trafalgar High School, Harold Cressy, and the Livingstone High School (which Sathima attended).

<sup>44</sup> *Cape Standard*, June 23 1936, 4.

<sup>45</sup> Iyer occupies a space that Bodley (1999) and Dennis O’Rourke (1987) remind us might appear to perform an “educational” function for the First World to learn about the Third, but more typically produces “experts” on others who are often more dangerous for the superficiality of information gained than valuable for their insights. In addition, Iyer fails to acknowledge that the tourist culture he operated in works on the principles of supply and demand: where the demand for the familiar in contexts of strangeness results in the supply of that kind of “culture.” In the spirit of Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998) the process might be expressed as follows: American/Western tourists want American/Western popular music but in an exotic context. Iyer was not a member of the communities of performers, all he heard was the familiar sounds of American pop. He was unable, for example, to distinguish local identities through the grain or tone color of the individual voice as those in the Cape clearly could do. The lack might perhaps not have been on the Filipino side as much as indicative of Iyer’s own cursory involvement with that performance culture.

<sup>46</sup> Before coming across Kaja Silverman’s work on *The Acoustic Mirror* (1988), I had been using the idea of the mirror as an analogy for the kinds of reflections facilitated by sound recordings and other imported objects like books. That insight drew on Baudrillard’s discussion in *The System of Objects* of the mirror and the non-reflective television screen in contemporary homes (1996). While I use Silverman’s term (borrowed from Guy Rosolato) I am doing so somewhat differently. She talks about the female voice as a kind of acoustic mirror, one that simultaneously exteriorizes and interiorizes in every utterance, and spills over into the boundaries between subject and object (Silverman 1988, 80).

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