

# THE ART OF 1-4-5

Pre-task : An elegant and classy music

Lwanda Gogwana is a trumpet player, composer, arranger and educator. He is particularly passionate about the music of our rich and diverse South African heritage.

Lwanda traces the Marabi music to a time when it was most elegant, classy and sophisticated, presented with dignity and respect. In this period, the musicians were informally and / or classically trained, receiving and giving their lessons on upright piano's.

Lwanda describes Marabi music as 1-4-5. This refers to the sound. 1-4-5 is a musical structure that gives space for all the other instruments to shine individually through improvisation and collectively, to create a strong musical message.

Lwanda compares this to uBuntu as a philosophical foundation, to describe the community in listening and respecting others on the bandstand. The instrumentation of the piano, saxophones tenor, alto, trumpet, clarinet, drums and the banjo all work together, giving each other space to state something, and are often in conversation with each other.

## Some of the leading performers

There were many famous musicians that excelled in Marabi music. Thomas Mabiletsa, the Zulu pianist, played stride piano which was the signature instrument of early Marabi. There were William and Wilfred Mseleku and The Merry Blackbirds. Bra Willie Gumede was born in Nkandla KZN and moved to Johannesburg. With a melting pot of languages, cultures and people migrating or exiling in and out of the City of Gold, Johannesburg was one of many hubs of this urban musical movement. You find Sesotho, Setswana, Xhosa and Zulu languages all in early recordings of marabi. Marabi developed around the 1-4-5 musical progression and produced a vital and unique South African musical culture and style that has continued through multiple generations, all the way up to the current day.

From the Sophiatown Shuffle sound of the swing and big band era, like the Elite Swingsters, to the advanced compositions of Bra Todd Matshikiza, to the avant-garde with Bra Winston Mankunku Ngozi's classic *Yakhal Nkomo*, to fusion jazz, with Bra Zakes Nkosi and the contemporary musicians, including Lwanda himself.

## The recordings

The book *Marabi Nights* written by Chris Ballantine comes with a CD of 25 well known Marabi pieces. Lwanda has chosen three of these pieces to transcribe and perform. These pieces are *Tsaba Tsaba ke No. One* by the Pitch Black Follies. *Qua Qua* by William and Wilfred Mseleku and *uMajaji* by the Merry Blackbirds.

## Now, answer these questions

*The goal of the first task is to listen to this music and get it into your ears.*

1. Once you have located some Marabi music choose the one song you love the most and listen out for the call-and-response nature of the melody.

What is the pattern which this melody follows?

Is it AABBA? Or does it break from this pattern and include a C section too?

2. Can you hear a call-and-response pattern between the instrumentalists?

Perhaps it is the left hand of the pianist on beats 1 and 3, and the drums on beats 2 and 4?

Can you sing or play this call-and-response separately from the melody?

3. Can you hear the base movement in the song you have chosen?

Can you isolate the base lines and sing or play them separately?

4. Now can you sing or play the melody by ear, on your instrument?

Can you improvise on the melody and make a variation of the melody line?

Why not transcribe the melody line for us and make a recording of your playing it?

*This will be valuable for building up an educational archive for the future.*