

Our languishing heritage comes home



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with Cornelius Thomas

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MUSICAL MEMORIES: Johnny Dyani strums away at the bass in this file photograph. With the albums of the Johnny Dyani Quartet now available at jazz outlets, a chunk of South Africa's jazz heritage has come home.

LAST year I suggested that Duncan Village-born bassist Johnny Dyani was better known in Europe than in his own country — as is the case with so many of our artists.

To wit, painter Garth Erasmus, jazz vocalist Sathima Bea Benjamin and actress Amelia Blossom Pegram.

I also said talk of the African renaissance had not resulted in the music of our lost musicians, like Dyani and Walmer Township-born saxophonist Dudu Pukwana, becoming readily available for South African enjoyment.

The other day I stumbled upon six Dyani albums. This “discovery” and subsequent listening exhilarated me. The albums are: *The Witch-doktor's Son*, by Dyani and others, circa 1977; *Parade*, by the Joe Bonner Trio, including Dyani, 1979, and featuring three previously unissued numbers: *Wild is the Wind*, *Hurry Up and Wait* and a Charlie Parker tune, *Au Privave*; *Mbizo*, by the Johnny Dyani Quartet, 1981; *Afrika*, by Johnny Dyani, 1983; *Suburban Fantasies*, by Joe Bonner and Dyani, 1983, and *Song*

for Biko, by the Johnny Dyani Quartet, 1978.

Song for Biko was recorded on July 18, 1978, the 40th birthday of Pukwana, and reprinted last year with the previously unissued *Flower in the Village*.

Flower in the Village will be of particular delight to jazz aficionados in East London.

The 21-minute track consists of two movements: *Flower of Peace* and *Duncan Village*. On *Flower* Dyani opens with a solo, plucking bass chords that speak of the rare lulls in the hurly burly of Duncan Village life.

Then, with the rest of the quartet kicking in, Duncan Village life opens in a musical orgasm, with Dudu at his saxophonic best. And it goes on until Dyani interprets, I think, the slow resolution of the end of the villagers' day.

Listen also to Dyani's *Song for Biko* on this album. And, whether you're from Ginsberg or Walmer Township, you'll find the sax of Pukwana connecting you with the passion of Biko, with bassist Dyani communicating the steadfastness of principle that characterised the

young martyr.

This is heavy stuff; it's not for the fusion-hearted.

With these albums available at your local jazz outlet, in a way, Johnny Dyani has come home.

Maybe the art of Erasmus will soon be enjoyed here in South Africa instead of being sold to the Museum of African Art at the Smithsonian in Washington, DC. And perhaps Benjamin's ten albums will be available in our country soon. Perchance Pegram will grace the stage at Gauloises Warehouse in Cape Town or the Guild Theatre, East London. Add to this Dudu. Add the trunksful of music and boxes of books languishing in exile.

“We have more renaissance material in this country than mineral wealth” says Hugh Masekela, “(but) we are the only country in the world that does not show itself enough, that does not listen to itself enough.”

I suppose the doyen of South African heritage music meant that when that happens, the African renaissance will be here.