

Daily Dispatch, July 13, 2001

Willie Kriek remembered



WILLIE "KRIEK" PRETORIUS

WHEREAS local jazz musicians at times struggle, often having to play bread (no butter) gigs and constantly worrying about transport, there was a time when musicians had it tougher still.

One of the finest of North End-Parkside musicians, the late saxophonist Willie "Kriek" Pretorius (1928-1972) mostly walked to gigs.

A waiter, the Kriek started making music during the 1940s, playing often with East London's master drummer Oom Basie Pepper.

Later he formed his own band, Willie's Swing Aces, but he played with other bands as well, for example The Cuban Stars.

"He was more on the jazz side, but he played anything, anywhere," Oom Basie recently said.

Indeed the Kriek played in the City Hall, the Drill Hall, The Jungle and the Night Spot.

Often, after a gig with jazzmen Eric Nomvete and William Mbali at the Peacock Hall in East Bank, he walked home to North End (and later Parkside).

"Hey, Mr Kriek," the *tsotsis* saluted him. They knew his amble and the proud hold of his chin even in the black night.

According to his widow, Winnie Pretorius, "He walked through that location and no one ever touched him. They loved him there."



BackBeat

with Cornelius Thomas

Some Fridays (in the 1950s and 60s) Kriek and his friend Toeties John took the 17h00 train to King William's Town.

There they rocked every house and hall in need of music.

Early morning, they napped at Pelham's Boarding House, and at 06h00 the Kriek was on the train back to East London — he had a family, and there was his son Tony to teach still.

The Kriek was intensely a family man. "He always took the family to Queen's Park, to the beach."

Weekdays after work he practiced his sax, and when Winnie brought him a flask of tea he responded: "Aah, nobody makes better tea than you and Five Roses."

Then he got down to disciplining Tony into becoming a musician. Today Tony plays for Rob's Combo, and the legacy of the Kriek lives on.

In 1972 Willie Kriek died in tragic circumstances. Still, he is a role model from whom musicians can learn.

The Kriek is also one of the subjects of a forthcoming book on North End.