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Sakhile or Spirits Rejoice

Jutta Keller, Jo'burg/South Africa, 1982

Racial harmony - we are all brothers together - that's what Afro Indigenous Jazz Music can create in South Africa.

Overwhelmed by this first insight of the South African black band "Sakhile", opened the doors to a "new" type of fusion between African style and modern Jazz.

In my experience as a German tourist visiting the Chelsea Club in Johannesburg, I had no intuition of what to expect. But positively surprised, unlike most other bands, I was drawn into this tribal, mystique atmosphere right from the start.

The metallic clang of a cow bell filtered through a haze of incense and the orange glow of stage lights, amidst six tribally dressed musicians.

Starting with a simple harmony of their native voices they broke the anxiety of the audience.

The band consists of two Zulus from Durban and four Sothos from the Transvaal area including the head musician from Soweto (South Western Township; S.A.'s largest urban black township with about one million people).

The saxophonist announced the different numbers:

"We combine the Western influence with our African style
and we call it 'a beautiful feeling'."

A striking feature of their playing was the way in which the individual members blended with each other to form the refreshing Afro Jazz sound. There was no sign of any instrument dominating the overall team sound. The percussionist mastered the multitude of his native instruments: African bongas, Jewish harp and marimba - providing a firm rhythm for the intricate African rhythm.

Even a blind man could have imagined the vivid stage appearance evoked by this intensive "soul playing" creating magical moments. Their music can be tentatively described as a fusion between the primitive and spiritual sounds of Africa with a complex phrasing and technical riffs of Western progressive Jazz.

The audience was elevated into an euphoric state that left them gasping for more after each number.

Their casual cool professionalism was exploded in the encore number, when the two percussionists treated the audience to a mind-blowing drum-solo of Afro Jazz rhythms satisfying all age groups.

After weeks of touring around South Africa I finally felt the true pulse of Africa, deeply wishing that other Europeans could share the same experience. Would it not be possible to plant their roots also in our country?