

A jazzy touch from Mdantsane



BackBeat
with Cornelius Thomas

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WORD has it that local jazz talent is being spread around Buffalo City. This weekend a Mdantsane jazz band will bring the unicity a jazzy touch.

The new jazz outfit, iMonti, will be spilling jazz, fusion, mbaqanga, and marabi at Emzini African Restaurant and Jazz Café in Berlin.

iMonti is the newest jazz band in Buffalo City, having been formed last year January.

The band consists of Phutumile Lali on lead guitar, Vusumzi Nzwane on bass guitar, Mbulelo Mkunukwela on keyboard, while Andile Mbonelwa keeps the beat on drums.

Although a young outfit still, leader Phutumile Lali, 43, is already a veteran of the local jazz scene.

When George Benson with his *Weekend in LA* overwhelmed the South African jazz market in the 1970s, Lali found himself swept into jazz. But not off his feet, he says. He held fast to one of the local African jazz greats of the time, the late lead guitarist Cyir Magubane.

Although mesmerised by Benson, and emulating him, Lali retained his



Keyboardist Mbulelo Mkunukwela of iMonti.

African touch throughout his music career.

Lali first played for the band Ingqigo in 1974. Nzwane played bass for this group.

Shortly after, Lali formed his own band, Kasai.

In 1991, Lali, like so many Eastern Cape jazzists before him, left for Johannesburg and its allure of fame and money.

He formed the iMeko Jazz Band which, after a

stint at the Court 'n Pub at the Sandton Plaza Hotel, released the album *Bambelela* (Hold On) on the RPM label.

But some things scratched his soul.

The media popularisation of kwaito, for instance, "It's a vague music that uses vulgar language. It is not our culture," Lali ventures.

Being removed from the "original African music" of the Eastern Cape was

another irritation that prompted him to return to the source.

And to marabi.

"The raw version of the rural areas, not the modernised version of Hugh Masekela," he takes pains to point out.

"I want the young people to know where marabi comes from. I want them to learn about how music came from singing during planting and stick fights. I don't want that heritage to be lost. I want to reclaim the true African sounds."

For an African renaissance experience through jazz and marabi brought by recording artists (Lali and Nzwane), Emzini's is the place this Saturday at 19h00. Cover charge will be R20.

• Charles Poole of Smokey Swallows in Vincent is planning a series of jazz gigs for the first Sunday of every month, starting on August 5.

Under this arrangement, Poole says he hopes to bring out of town jazz personalities of the calibre of Bruce Cassidy, Robbie Jansen and Winston Mankunku to every third gig. At the same time he hopes to continue showcasing local talent.