

Gawulana gets going



BackBeat
with Cornelius Thomas

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LIVE AT CD'S: Cliffie Freeman (left) enjoys Lulama Gawulana's serious offer in a call and response session at CD's Jazz Cafe in December 1999.

Picture by Cornelius Thomas

MDANTSANE-based bass guitarist Lulama Gawulana is a household name in jazz circles, and indeed his Gawulana Quartet has been one of the mainstays of jazz in East London the past decade. But things have been a tad slow lately. Still, Gawulana has been busy.

Not performing.

He went into retreat and started composing.

Gawulana emerged from his creative spell with a handful of original African and Latin-based jazz tunes, most notably the upbeat *Zahlangana* and nostalgic *Home is Home*, both of which invoke the spirit of the African renaissance, and also Latin-based tunes *East London Vibes* and a reworked take on *East London Samba*.

Since CD's Jazz Cafe closed at the end of October, support for jazz has been waning, Gawulana says.

He reckons local jazz lovers no longer get the inspiration greats like Robbie Jansen, Hugh Masekela and Hotep Galeta engendered the past two years, but neither do they support local talent.

"People keep on asking me, 'What are you doing nowadays?' I tell them, but when it comes to the night of the gig they're never there. And when I get to their homes they want me to listen to Americans like Al Jarreau and George Benson."

Gawulana feels South Africans have to wean themselves of American jazz, and find themselves in the talents of vocalists like Retsi Pule, Don Tshomela and

Pinisi Sauli.

Gigs have hardly been forthcoming for local jazz bands the past few months.

One of the few gigs the Gawulana Quartet won was for the Department of Sport, Arts, Recreation and Culture film and video seminar two weeks ago at the Fish River Sun.

The Quartet sounds crisper than ever before, and richer for the recent addition of a trumpeter, one Pex Nduluka.

Gawulana has come a long way since he attended jazz workshops conducted by "global figures" in Lahore, Pakistan, in 1997.

On that tour he also performed in the musical play *Members of Society* (directed by East Londoner Julius Mtsaka), for which he composed the theme song.

In 1999 he backed East London's famous female jazz exile, London-based Pinisi Sauli, when she visited her home city. Last year he backed saxophonist Zim Ngqwana at the Guild Theatre and opened for Hugh Masekela at Waverley Park.

He believes things will look up for jazz.

Next weekend the world famous Soweto String Quartet — billed to perform at the Guild Theatre on February 23 — won't be the only act around here. Gawulana tells me his Quartet, featuring Pex Nduluka on trumpet, will be performing at the Shukushukuma tavern in Ilitha near Berlin on Saturday, February 24.