

Daily Dispatch
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Ibrahim revisits Cape Town



BackBeat

with Cornelius Thomas



**PREJUDICE
MEDICINE:**
Jazz maestro
Abdullah
Ibrahim has
produced
*Cape Town
Revisited*.

IN THE jazz world Abdullah Ibrahim towers as the foremost South African contributor to composition and practice. Over the past 40 odd years he has produced an unsurpassed body of jazz. He started as Dollar Brand, first imbibing the sounds migrants and “exiles” from all over the world brought to District Six, Cape Town. He then pioneered Cape jazz in the clubs of the mother city.

Brand started his recording corpus, when he took the Cape sounds up north where, with the help of Hugh Masekela and Jonas Gwanga, he fused it with remnants of marabi and elements of mbaqanga, kwela and American jazz. The result was an African jazz album by the *Jazz Epistles* (1959).

After Sharpeville (1960) and the subsequent state of emergency, musicians like Brand were seen as subversives. They brought people together irrespective of race, colour, creed or social orientation. In 1962 he left for Europe. He’s been in exile since. Meanwhile he converted to Islam and “became” Abdullah Ibrahim.

On one of his rare returns to South Africa, of course, he produced our other national anthem, the Cape Flats passion play, *Manenberg* (literally: man and mountain).

In exile Ibrahim produced a body of work, a discography of which literally fills a book — Lars Rasmussen’s *Abdullah Ibrahim: Discography* (2000).

Recently he returned to South Africa and produced *Cape Town Revisited* — a summation of his take on philosophy and history.

The Abdullah Ibrahim Trio (consisting also of bassist Marcus McLaurine and drummer George

Gray) recorded it in Cape Town in 1997.

The album consists of tunes covering themes from the Khoisan to Soweto.

Damara Blue pays tribute to Khoisan music. *Some Day Soon Sweet Samba* anticipates the ultimate freedom celebration — in a melting pot of Cape and Brazilian sounds.

Cape Town to Congo Square comes in three movements. These speak of joy at home (*District Six Carnival*), the African diaspora (*African Street Parade*), and reminiscences on history (*Too-Kah*).

Song for Sathima is a dedication to Ibrahim’s wife, Sathima Bea Benjamin.

It presents a spiritual song with piano and bass “talking”.

A beautiful piece is *Water from an Ancient Well* on which Ibrahim affirms ancestral wisdoms. It is one of his all-time favourite tunes.

Malay influences texture *Tuang Guru* — about a Muslim exile on Robben Island — and *Barakaat* (the blessing).

On *Soweto* Ibrahim conjures sounds from his Kofifi bag.

Other tunes are *Tintinyana*, *Eleventh Hour*, *Tsakwe-Royal Blue*, *The Mountain* and *The Wedding*.

This album, Ibrahim believes, is medicine — for the acquired diseases of prejudice and racism.

● The Alan Webster Quartet — featuring Webster on sax, drummer Mark Rausch, bassist Donne Dowman and pianist Matthew Boon — returns to Smokey Swallows this Sunday for an encore performance.