ACTIVISM THROUGH MUSIC DURING THE APARTHEID ERA AND BEYOND

When Voices Meet

THE LEXINGTON SERIES IN HISTORICAL ETHNOMUSICOLOGY: DEEP SOUNDINGS

Ambigay Yudkoff

Activism through Music during the Apartheid Era and Beyond

The Lexington Series in Historical Ethnomusicology: Deep Soundings

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Activism through Music during the Apartheid Era and Beyond

When Voices Meet

Ambigay Yudkoff

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For My Dearest Parents
. . . who voted for the first time in 1994, more than
fifty years after they were born in South Africa
and
For Tamara, Jasmin, and Brandon

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> Music is a great blessing. It has the power to elevate and liberate us. It sets people free to dream. It can unite us to sing with one voice. Such is the value of music.
>
> —Nelson Mandela

Listening to the music of Sharon Katz & The Peace Train during an intimate performance at Caffè Lena in Saratoga Springs, New York, liberated me from my intellectual slumber. The familiarity of Katz's South African musical style and her powerful message of social justice, unity, and peace inspired my research into musical activism. Sharon Katz shared her vision, artistic materials, contacts, and time with me throughout the following two years. I am genuinely grateful for the access she provided.

This book was a journey in several ways. My research entailed extensive travel in two countries, South Africa and the United States, tracking the musical activism of Sharon Katz & The Peace Train. My heartfelt thanks go to many people who assisted with my research: the participants of The Peace Train initiatives in South Africa and the United States who shared their personal experiences with me; Mama Mary Lwate for opening her home to me and allowing me to visit the children at the orphanage in Mabopane; Nonhlanhla Wanda and Wendy Quick for sharing their stories with me; Marilyn Cohen for collating valuable data, and Marc Duby, my mentor in South Africa, for recognizing the potential of my research and supporting my endeavors.

The coeditors of this book, David Hebert and Jonathan McCollum, provided me with the opportunity to realize the culmination of this historical journey in musical activism. David and Jonathan are scholars par excellence whose intellectual depth and critical insights made me see "with new eyes"

the multidisciplinary appeal of my work. I am deeply appreciative of their guidance and experience. A special thank you to the Acquisitions Editor, Courtney Morales, for her meticulous attention to the technical aspects of this book.

My parents are an ongoing source of inspiration. As a child of color growing up in apartheid South Africa, I was always keenly aware of our country's political and social injustices. Besides my parents' sociopolitical activism within our community, they shared a rich background in music. My mother was an actress and singer in community theater, and my late father was a glorious tenor. Although my parents had limited resources, they supported my musical aspirations and encouraged my lifelong love of learning. My mother, Savitri Pillay, has always been steadfast in her support of my ventures. For this, I feel blessed.

My family—Charles, Tamara, Jasmin, and Brandon—provided feedback, encouragement, and love throughout my research and writing. I will always cherish your presence in my life.

Chapter 1

Get on the Peace Train

We need a sweet survival, love revival, Peace Train!
Make a heart connection, sweet affection, Peace Train!
Come on, get on, Come on, get on
Get on the Peace Train!
Meet the Love Conductor,
He's your brother on the Peace Train!
Choo! Choo!

—*Peace Train* by Sharon Katz
and Bolden Abrams

INTRODUCTION

The immigrant experience is exhausting. There is undoubtedly a sense of gratitude for all accomplishments despite the many obstacles, but the undeniable yearning lingers. If only you could hear someone in the neighborhood who talks like you and see perhaps a recognizable face and smell the warm ocean breeze that blows across the eastern shores of South Africa, if that's from where you have come. Seeking this familiarity, I scour the events calendar of Saratoga Springs, New York, searching for artists who will bring a piece of Africa to me here in the United States. And so, it was on a quiet Saturday afternoon in the Spring of 2013; I discovered that Sharon Katz, a South African musician, and Wendy Khetiwe Quick would be performing at Caffè Lena. The latter is an intimate and historic venue in downtown Saratoga Springs, a few miles from my home in upstate New York.

Caffè Lena, established in May 1960, is "widely recognized as the longest continuously operating folk music venue in the United States."[1] The Library of Congress calls Caffè Lena "an American treasure," and the Grammy Foundation has recognized this iconic venue for its important contributions to the development of American music (ibid.). Most of the artists who performed at this coffee house since the 1960s were folk musicians and songwriters, most notably Bob Dylan, Ani DiFranco, Arlo Guthrie, and Pete Seeger, among others. Following in their footsteps on this memorable evening in April 2013, Sharon Katz and Wendy Quick performed on the same stage as famous folk musicians' past. These two artists graced that small platform of Caffè Lena with its reddish exposed brick backdrop.

As a member of the audience seated at a table closest to the stage, I was immediately drawn in by Katz's performance, distinctly South African accent, and colorful African-print clothing. Her voice has a gentle lilting folk-like quality that contrasts with her style of guitar playing. Katz describes her music as a blend of traditional South African musical styles such as *Maskanda*, *Mbaqanga*, and Township Jive with Afro-Jazz and a little rock (see Glossary for musical styles). During her singing of the South African National Anthem, *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika* (lit. God [Lord] Bless Africa), Katz encouraged audience participation. At the end of the song, she smiled and declared, "There's a South African in the house!" I must admit I was an enthusiastic participant. After a brief conversation with Katz during the intermission, I was intrigued. Her musical journey and a brief description of her work warranted further investigation. It was the inspiration I needed. Within a few months, I immersed myself in research for my doctoral studies documenting the grassroots musical activism of the performer, composer, educator, therapist, and musical activist Sharon Katz and the formation of The Peace Train.

Ethnomusicology has addressed the challenges and opportunities of using the life story of an individual musician to convey a larger narrative about history and politics through music. Researchers have long been detailing the work of musicians within a global context. Veit Erlmann (1991) examines the evolution of Black musical performance from the late nineteenth century into the twentieth century. Timothy Rice (1994) traces the role of music and dance in the Bulgarian culture through a study of two musicians from the Varimezov family. Incredibly insightful is the author's interpretation of the emic/etic[2] distinction related to the ethnomusicologist. The Egyptian singer, Umm Kulthum, is the subject of Virginia Danielson's work. Danielson (1998) examines Egyptian culture and how the singer navigates the twentieth century's impact on Arabic music. An essay by Qureshi (2001) on Begum Akhtar examines the life history of a celebrated female musician well known in India and Pakistan during Hindustani music's momentous

transformation in the twentieth century. In Rees (2009), the focus is on individual musicians active in different amateur and professional music scenes in mainland China, Hong Kong, and Chinese communities in Europe. The contributors use biography to deepen the understanding of Chinese music by locating these portraits of rural folk singers, urban opera singers, literati, and musicians within the context of their geographic and cultural backgrounds. These examples of studies highlight the fact that biographies in ethnomusicology are a global phenomenon. Nettl asserts (2005), "We do not privilege elite repertories . . . we must, in the end, study all of the world's music, from all people and nations, classes, sources, periods of history" (p. 13). Therefore, it is imperative that grassroots musicians such as Sharon Katz, working with children and young people, who provide rich musical, social, and political experiences, are studied to expand the reach of historical ethnomusicology.

One of the central themes explored in this study of Sharon Katz & The Peace Train is the relationship between music and nation-building. Katz's formation of The Peace Train and associated projects reveal a compelling narrative of multigenerational collaboration. This relationship occurs through music, travel, performances, and socialization as a cultural practice and vehicle for racial integration and intercultural understanding. Through extensive fieldwork in South Africa and the United States that includes interviews, recordings of musical performances, and observations, the grassroots activism of Sharon Katz & The Peace Train is documented. Among the several intersections of her work, Katz offers a vision of the possibilities of national identity and belonging amid enormous diversity in South Africa's transition from apartheid to a fully democratic dispensation. Then, Katz transplants these possibilities to the United States. Instead of the United States showing South Africa (a shift in the global North and global South dynamic of politics and power), the reverse occurs through Katz & The Peace Train project in the United States in 2016. Understanding the political and social climate of South Africa during the apartheid era provides the backdrop against which Katz's activism emerged.

Historical Backdrop to Music and Resistance in South Africa since 1948

> Beginning in 1948, the Nationalistic Government in South Africa enacted laws to define and enforce racial segregation. South Africa's apartheid system was formalized and entrenched through the laws of the National Party, a White party comprising primarily Afrikaners, which came into power that year. Apartheid policies affected every sphere of South African life, from marriage and freedom of movement to education. (Yudkoff in Hebert and Kertz-Welzel 2012, 95)

Leonard Thompson's *A History of South Africa* (2001) provides a detailed chronology of the watershed events of the apartheid era. He details the organizations that originated during that time and enacted laws that secured the apartheid government's stranglehold on people of color. These laws impacted all South Africans. As a child of color growing up in South Africa, I have vivid memories of my childhood in apartheid South Africa. I was fortunate to have the wisdom and guidance of my family and community, who were all actively engaged in social justice issues at some level. Although I could not understand why we could not sit inside Durban restaurants, my mother would always explain calmly that the government created these laws. Of course, I asked too many questions, and she would sometimes become frustrated with me, as many of these laws were enacted before I was born.

The Population Registration Act of 1950 classified people by race, while the Group Areas Act of the same year designated areas where people could reside based on race. Figure 1.1 is a map that broadly depicts the separation of people along racial lines in the province of Natal (now KwaZulu-Natal) during the apartheid era.

In 1952, the African National Congress (ANC) (originating in 1912 as the South African Native National Congress), and its allies, launched a passive resistance campaign against the South African government. Several events of the next twelve years changed the face of the resistance. One of the most devastating attacks was the Sharpeville massacre of 1960. Police killed sixty-seven Black anti-pass law demonstrators. The banning of African political organizations occurred in the same year, followed by the life imprisonment of

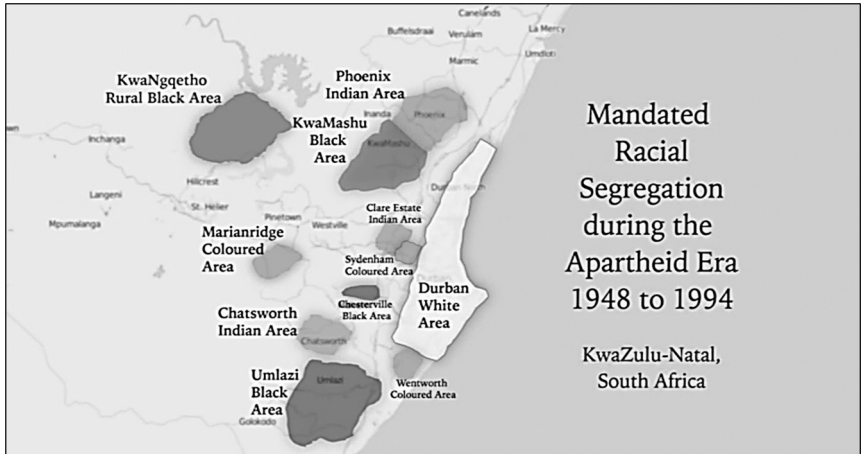

Figure 1.1 Map of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa Depicting Designated Areas of the Group Areas Act of 1950 Based on Race. Image sourced from the documentary *When Voices Meet,* 2015. Courtesy of Sharon Katz. Used with permission.

Nelson Mandela and other ANC and PAC[3] leaders in 1964. Vershbow (2010, p. 1) describes the evolution of resistance movements during the forty-six years of apartheid as transforming from "loosely organized unions of nonviolent protestors to powerful and armed coalitions such as the African National Congress (ANC)." The various musics of this struggle against apartheid created a sense of unity and solidarity among protestors. Vershbow (ibid.) argues that the song is "a communal act of expression that shed light on the injustices of apartheid." In this context, the singing of songs is not surprising as songs have always been an integral part of African culture and its people's everyday lives.

Although a detailed discussion of indigenous musical practices is beyond the scope of this book, the profound impact of traditional music is not lost on me. My mother has often shared amusing stories of my childhood. As a baby, I was very fussy unless I was carried on my African nanny's back and rocked to sleep. I also have vivid recollections of the traditional Zulu lullaby "Thula Baba" that was sung to me during my African childhood. This experience was not in conflict with listening to the American folk lullaby "Hush Little Baby" that my mother sang to me. My music theory exams through the Royal Schools of Music in London, for example, reinforced the strong European influence in South Africa. These exams were taken while I was attending a segregated local high school. This Western influence included attending opera productions and ballets at the Alhambra Theatre in Durban. It was also not unusual for me to sing and play my guitar at school, performing African or Western folk songs, or going Christmas caroling in my neighborhood with friends from a nearby church.

Nonetheless, my enjoyment of African music was a daily part of life in South Africa: listening to African children, many of whom were my friends, on the streets walking home from school; on the radio and sometimes the television; hearing the singing of African domestic workers as they completed their chores in the yard and around the house; and most excitingly, when I watched the colorfully attired ensembles of African singers and dancers (often including children as young as four years old) on the Durban beachfront as they entertained tourists and locals, trying to earn some money.

Then there were other cultural influences. As children of Indian descent (third generation in South Africa), it was also not strange to my brother and me that our parents enrolled us in Saturday morning music classes. There, we learned to play the harmonium, a keyboard instrument commonly used in Indian music. Although we did not speak an Indian language, I found that music, song, dance, and community events such as the celebration of Hindu festivals reinforced aspects of my cultural heritage. As if this was not culturally stimulating enough, my home was in an "Indian" suburb (a designation of the apartheid system of segregation) where many of my neighbors were

Muslims (followers of Islam). Before sunrise every morning, I awoke to the early morning call to prayer in Arabic blaring through a loudspeaker, sung by the Imam of a local mosque. Four cultures (African, European, Indian [Hindu], and Muslim) reflect the complexity of growing up in a rich multicultural environment. To me, there was no confusion or conflict in negotiating these spaces. It was normal.

Significantly, in both African and Indian cultures, the vocal music I learned were rooted in tradition and taught through oral transmission. De Beer and Shitandi (2012) refer to the anthropological and archeological sources as well as oral history recordings that "provide clear evidence of a long-standing quasi-choral music culture in Africa" (p. 185) that predates colonization. The seminomadic and pastoral Maasai people of Kenya, for example, have retained their traditions and lifestyle. This resilience is remarkable since they have been displaced, and they have struggled to hold on to parts of their land against European invasion. Their homophonic and polyphonic choruses indicate the social and communal aspects of indigenous African communities such as the "Ijesha-Yoruba of Nigeria, Nguu of Tanzania, Zulu, Xhosa and Swazi of South Africa" (ibid.). Maasai music is predominantly vocal, where rhythmic harmonies of a chorus support the melody performed by the song leader/s or *olaranyani*. This call-and-response form between the *olaranyani* and the group is one of the popular forms in indigenous African music adopted by Sharon Katz for some of her compositions. The importance of bringing communities together through music is the foundation of Katz's musical activism. This community engagement bears a striking resemblance to the act of communal singing, yet another significant aspect of traditional African music. Communal singing for rituals, celebrations such as weddings, and performances continue among several African language groups from South Africa such as the Zulu, Xhosa, Pedi (Bapedi), and Sotho.

While the Maasai people from Kenya and the Bapedi people from South Africa (among the vast array of other indigenous peoples of Africa) maintain their traditions, the impact of colonialism, modernization, and the promotion of Christianity through the work of missionaries cannot be overstated. De Beer and Shitandi (2012, 186) argue that:

> Africans easily adopted the Western tradition of choral music brought into Africa by missionaries because of the number of concurrences, including the social nature of singing together, polyphonic structures in music, and the function of music as an enhancement of social (religious) activity, such as the congregational singing of Christian hymns. These hymns were later transformed into new African choral styles by being adapted to African practices, including language, parallel movement between voices, responsorial elements,

> and rhythmic alterations, through the inclusion of dances or instrumental accompaniments.

Elements of traditional musical practices often permeate new compositions in urban settings. This practice is evident in the music of Sharon Katz & The Peace Train that developed within the boundaries of contemporary urban culture in South Africa in the 1990s. Katz's music is easily accessible to Western audiences because her compositions have been influenced, in part, by her study of Western music (both theory and form). This Eurocentric influence in music is not unusual for any South African who grew up in an urban setting during the apartheid era. The Dutch and British colonizers,[4] at various times, influenced language, education, music, and many other aspects of South African life since the arrival of the first Dutch settlers in 1652. However, it is also abundantly clear that the inspiration behind Katz's musical activism is grounded in an Afrocentric identity through both the substance of her messaging and the vital elements of African musical style in Katz's songs.

Highlights of Traveling Musical Groups in South Africa

The art of storytelling among Africa's indigenous people has also been significant, with folk tales around fires holding captive audiences, young and old. There is an inextricable link between storytelling and music—a vehicle that captures a feeling, a moment, a narrative, or a message. Over a century before the emergence of Sharon Katz & The Peace Train, in the mid-1800s, traveling minstrel shows began to visit South Africa.

The earliest of these performers were White English colonists performing in "blackface."[5] These crass performances—following the premiere of the Virginia Minstrels in New York—smacked of racism "ideally suited as a rationalization of the anxiety of White settlers in South Africa attempting to come to terms with the strength of precolonial social formations and independent African political power" (Veit Erlmann 1991, 30). The arrival of the Christy Minstrels in Cape Town in 1862 from the United States elevated the popularity of blackface minstrel shows playing a dominant role in the "popular White musical and theatrical entertainment in South Africa" (ibid.). In towns and cities such as Durban, Kimberley, and Cape Town, where English culture predominated, amateur minstrel groups flourished. The racist underpinnings of the American Minstrel troupes also permeated the culture and folk songs of both the Dutch Boer and Cape "Colored"[6] people.

This entertainment genre changed considerably when Black American minstrel troupes toured South Africa in the 1860s, singing spirituals of the American South. In the 1890s, Orpheus McAdoo and the Virginia Jubilee Singers were among the most popular visiting minstrel groups, touring the country four times. The spread in popularity of African American spirituals

inspired the formation of South African Black choirs and a subculture of rehearsals and competition that is a vibrant part of the South African music experience today. It is noteworthy that Katz recruited most students out of a similar culture of choir music competitions in the 1990s for the formation of the 500-voice choir with its inaugural performance at the Durban City Hall in 1992.

The impact of Orpheus McAdoo on the history of musical traveling groups in South Africa is extraordinary. He was born in 1858, the oldest child of slave parents in North Carolina. As a young man, he attended the Hampton Institute in Virginia, founded in 1868 as a higher education institution for emancipated slaves. McAdoo worked as a teacher and toured extensively with the Hampton Male Quartette, one of the best-known Afro-American quartets at the time. He later joined the Fisk Jubilee Singers. Their first world tour lasted seven years, introducing American and European audiences to "genuine Afro-American culture: the spirituals, the 'sorrow songs' as W. E. B. DuBois[7] called them" (Veit Erlmann 1991, 24). The tours of the Fisk Jubilee Singers extended to include Australia, India, and the Far East. Upon their return, McAdoo formed the Virginia Jubilee Singers in 1890 and set sail for England. After a short run and little success, McAdoo headed for South Africa, where he and his troupe triumphed, opening at the Vaudeville Theatre in Cape Town on June 30, 1890. They enjoyed the enthusiastic reception of mostly White audiences throughout the country, elevating the music of minstrels.

Fast forward to the 1950s, and White impresarios were organizing musical variety shows like "Zonk!" "Drums of Africa," "African Jazz," and "Variety." Some of these shows ran for more than a decade. The first all-Black South African musical was *King Kong: An African Jazz* that premiered on February 2, 1959, at the Wits Great Hall. This musical that chronicles the ascent and demise of the champion boxer Ezekiel "King Kong" Dhlamini was significant in creating opportunities for Black South Africans in the arts. It expanded the scope of South African theater playing to segregated Black and White audiences in major cities from Johannesburg, Cape Town, Port Elizabeth to Durban. Working as a creative force on King Kong's production was the architect and painter Arthur Goldreich, who created the decor and costumes for this jazz musical. An explanation of his political role in the resistance and association with Nelson Mandela (who attended the show's premiere in Johannesburg) appears in Chapter 2. More broadly, the Jewish people's role (Arthur Goldreich's heritage) in the struggle for liberation in South Africa is addressed.

Among the seventy-member cast were Miriam Makeba, Phyllis Mqoma, Hugh Masekela, and others who went on to highly successful careers both in South Africa and abroad. Miriam Makeba, whose powerful and distinctive