

MUSIC VAN DE CAAB

Formal Research

The focus of the formal research was to explore the origins of Cape music through an ethno-music audit of what had already been written about Cape music through time. The research aimed at exploring influences on Cape music by indigenous Khoe and San traditions; European folksongs; slave cultures from across India, Indonesia and Africa, and modern cross-cultural influences.

Fieldwork: starting at “home”

We realised from quite early on that the questions we were interested in exploring were not to be found solely in libraries or archives (if at all in some cases). We decided to undertake fieldwork with present day musicians and communities living in the surrounding Boland region. Alex's fieldwork resulted in the discovery of a wealth of musical talent among the farm workers of the surrounding Winelands region, and most surprising to us on our very own farm. We interviewed some of our vineyard workers for their memories and experiences of music during their upbringing, and through the course of their lives. The process of capturing these stories, was in some ways a process of community and personal transformation.

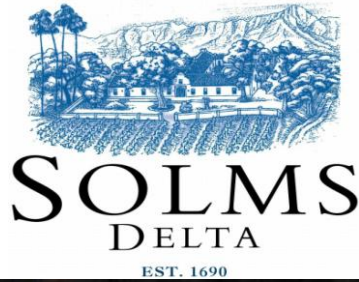


A Cape Community music project: The Delta Optel Band

As a result of this fieldwork on our own farm, Alex formed the Delta Optel Band, the first of our community music projects. The unofficial bandleader, Hannes Floors originally came from the small town of Ladismith in the Karoo desert, where he became fluent in the ethnic guitar music of the area, playing styles such as the vastrap and the riël. His wife, Hanna, who grew up in Upington in the mystical landscape of the Kalahari, sings and also dances occasionally. She is assisted on vocals by 14 year old Lolla Douw, and latterly by Alex who used to play on the accordion. While other members would come and go, the four of them would gather regularly to perform their special music, unique to the rural areas of the Cape. As Alex said of the band “some members of the band long for obscurity, while others long for recognition. Only time will tell”.

Branching out to surrounding communities

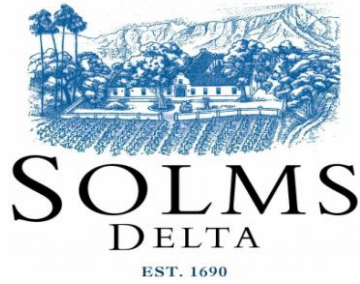
And this was just the beginning of our fieldwork research. From the surrounding community of Pniel, Alex was involved in interviews with community members such as Freddie Simpson, Sybil Lackay, and Quinton Fortuin. Pniel had originally been established as a mission station in 1843, and the current day inhabitants are very much in tune with their heritage and open about their links to the freed slaves who first lived there.



From the neighbouring community of Kylemore, Alex met with Pieter van der Westhuizen who works with Grietjie van Garies (of the Karoo) a tiny tannie of 80 years who is a musical legend amongst the people on our farm, and so we were connected outside of ourselves to our surrounding communities and to those further a field in the Karoo. We had also made the decision to not stick to one particular style of music such as vastrap or langarm, or a particular type of people that played it, but to cast the net wider towards the confluences of all of these musical styles in the Western Cape - and more often than not there was so much in common between these musical traditions. Alex interviewed Boeremusiek legend Nico Carstens about his understanding of traditional Cape music and how it influenced the rest of the country. In Cape Town our interviews extended into the research of Christmas bands, Klopse groups and the memories and experiences of Cape Jazz musicians and historians such as Hilton Schilder, Robbie Jansen and Vincent Kolbe.



Closer to home, Alex made contact with Frank Papier and his family who live on the farm Bosbou/La Motte in Franschhoek. The Papier family had been playing in the area for over half a century, and we found out that they actually used to play on Solms-Delta. The four Papier brothers - Frank, Albert, Neville and Tienie - are continuing the tradition started by their father, Marthinus Papier more than 70 years ago, when he first started performing in the Franschhoek valley. And so the Papier Langarm Orkes became part of our community networks and we realised that not only should we be preserving and honouring these musical traditions and styles, but we should be opening them up to the public. Our fieldwork project slowly inspired community programmes, associations and events that we staged on Solms-Delta. Alex had recently started the Delta Vastrap Genootskap, an informal association of various like-minded musicians in the Franschhoek valley and beyond. This included the well-known Papier brothers and many, many others, all playing their own brands of vastrap, langarm and goema. Alex played a pivotal role in reviving, but also in further developing these precious musical styles. In addition, he was deeply interested in the



role played by Gospel musicians, such as the Davids Family, as well as in the inner lives of the poor rural communities of the Cape Winelands.



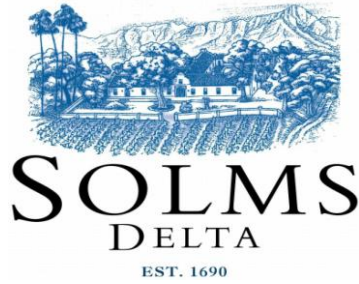
Contact us to take a Cape Music and Wine Tour of the Solms-Delta estate.

The beginnings of our Brass Band

Aside from our Optel band, we began a Solms-Delta brass band that was 40 members strong and spanned all ages and sexes on our farm. Inspired from a Bastille Day parade our farm had participated in 2008 where we were transformed into a Cape klopse troupe, our brass band was established to build on the enthusiasm, passion and excitement for the music that came out of participating in this event. After all the practices leading up to Bastille, the event itself exceeded all expectations as our farm kept the music and enthusiasm going over 5km down the parade route.



It was Alex's idea to harness all this enthusiasm and passion for music by creating a brass band on the farm that would continue longer than just one event or parade. Band practices began every Wednesday and Friday evening, and we were overwhelmed by the response of the farm residents. Mothers and sons, fathers, grandmothers and small children all wanted to be involved, and they were all committed and dedicated to attend every practice. It wasn't long until we had made connections with other Klopse troupes in the Boland region, and for the last couple of months we had been participating with the Wellington Klopse in competitions in the region. Alex's amazing ability to connect with young people produced a surprisingly strong (and increasing) interest among our farm youth in the traditional Cape folk musical styles.



Music van de Caab Musical Events



Solms-Delta also made the conscious decision to bring this music under a more popular spotlight. Alex was involved in the staging of many musical events in the Cape Winelands associated with the research and fieldwork we were doing - the first Franschoek Oesfees hosted in April 2008 being the most memorable and magical of the events.

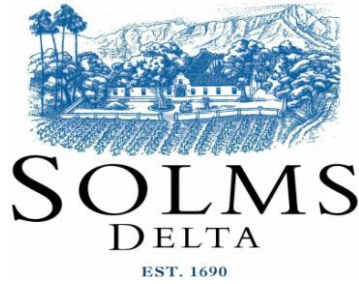
Striking a significant note in the Boland cultural calendar as the region's first full-scale harvest festival, the Oesfees was the realization of a dream shared by Solms-Delta farm owners Mark Solms and Richard Astor. The two recognized the need to give thanks for the harvest, and to include all who participated in it. The Franschoek Oesfees was the result: an authentic, inclusive, non-commercial musical celebration. With funding received from the Cape Winelands District Municipality, it would seem these principles were not only a priority for us as a private institution, but also for our community leaders within governmental structures. The 2008 Franschoek Oesfees was a resounding success that brought farm-workers, farm owners and music lovers together in end-of-season celebration.

Alex was deeply involved in the creation of the Franschoek Oesfees and its concept of inclusivity. He acknowledged the fundamental fusion of all Cape cultures, which has produced the Cape vernacular music. And despite his loss at the beginning of this year, we decided to go ahead with staging this musical event so that the work he was doing continues.

At the 2009 Franschoek Oesfees, held on April 4, eight hand-picked ensembles again performed vernacular music of the rural Cape. From goema to langarm and vastrap to boeremusiek, the exciting line-up of musicians included legendary South African saxophonist, Robbie Jansen. Other favourites at the festival were 'Karoo Kitaar Blues' star Hannes Coetzee, famous for his spoon-in-the-mouth slide style, and the Gramadoelas, with soulful lyrics from the pen of guitar-guru Les Javan, and the Baardskeerdersbos Orkes, widely known for their nostalgic songs, played on the banjo, concertina and accordion. Soulful vocalist Jacobus Cloete from Namaqualand made his debut appearance at this festival together with award-winning Riel-dancers and the House of David (the family band of Shasha-Lee Davids, one of the Top Ten Idols finalists) who performed traditional Cape 'Pinkster-Koortjies' and other local gospel styles.

Introducing our home-grown flair to the line-up were the Delta Optel Band and the Delta Brass Band, and of course the local Franschoek favourite, the Papier Langarm Orkes.

As for the future, the 'where do we go from here?' question. Our main concern is for this music project to continue and to reach out to an ever-wider community.



Next year's Franschhoek Oesfees at Solms-Delta is planned for Saturday 28 March 2010. Bookings will open early February.

[The Solms-Delta summer concert series running on Saturday evenings similarly showcase the talent of local musicians who play in Cape vernacular music styles]

A Cape Musical Heritage Centre

On the back of the astounding success of our previous and existing community projects and public initiatives, Solms-Delta is concerned with keeping the momentum going with the establishment of a Cape musical heritage centre as part of their Cape Music Project.

We have an historic building available that is currently being archaeologically excavated before it is renovated and then converted into a music centre during 2010. This centre is to be a sister institution to the Museum van de Caab, which already is open to the public on Solms-Delta estate.

The Music Centre is to be utilized as a base not only for archiving the knowledge accumulated during the fieldwork and research process, and the display of such knowledge, but above all as an educational resource for the wider community. The ultimate aim of the centre is to break down the artificial social divides that were created by Apartheid. In the course of the fieldwork and community projects already initiated through the music project, it became clear that the musical heritage of the Cape region could be used as a vehicle in successfully bringing together white and coloured Afrikaans speakers of the Boland region. The Western Cape has the specific challenge beyond this of a deep divide between coloured and black communities, and this is something that the educational initiatives of the Music centre will now set out to tackle. Exploration of the multi-layered roots of traditional Cape music (and its indigenous, slave, African, European, and modern cross-cultural influences), suggests that transformation of the kind that is difficult to achieve through so many other avenues, is possible to achieve through the bringing together of people through music.

Visit the Museum van de Caab to experience the history and culture of the Drakenstein Valley's inhabitants.