



Courtesy Abdullah Ibrahim

Jazz Epistles

Abdullah Ibrahim & Ekaya, and Keyon Harrold

Abdullah Ibrahim Piano
Keyon Harrold Special Guest Trumpet Player
Noah Jackson Cello, Bass
Will Terrill Drums
Cleave Guyton Alto Saxophone, Flute, Clarinet
Lance Bryant Tenor Saxophone
Andrae Murchison Trombone, Trumpet
Marshal McDonald Baritone Saxophone

PROGRAM

There will be no intermission.

Sunday, April 29 @ 7 PM

Zellerbach Theatre

Media Sponsor: 

PROGRAM NOTES

The Jazz Epistles were South Africa's first black jazz band and important contributors to modern jazz. Inspired by Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers, the band came into existence after the Dollar Brand Trio from Cape Town combined talents with alto saxophone king Kippie Moeketsi from Johannesburg and his two protégés, trumpeter Hugh Masekela and trombonist Jonas Gwangwa. Dollar Brand would later be known as Abdullah Ibrahim and his Trio, including Johnny Gertze on bass and Early Mabuza or Makaya Ntshoko on drums. These gentlemen were young, swaggering and smart exponents of bop and they became famous for their late-night jam sessions called Jazz at the Odin, at the Odin Theater in Sophiatown, outside of Johannesburg, where they morphed into the legendary Jazz Epistles.

Their 1959 recording, *Jazz Epistle, Verse 1*, brought them further acclaim, as did their participation in composer Todd Matshikiza's musical, *King Kong*. This told the story of South African heavyweight boxer Ezekiel "King Kong" Dlamini, and became a national and international hit.

Following the 1960 Sharpeville Massacre and the heightened oppression of the apartheid government, including the prohibition of jazz music, the members of the band emigrated to Europe and North America. Two of those members, Abdullah Ibrahim and Hugh Masekela, would go on to become jazz stars in their own right.

Abdullah Ibrahim was championed and produced by the great Duke Ellington, and was called "South Africa's Mozart" by Nelson Mandela. Hugh Masekela attended the prestigious Manhattan School of Music and in 1968, recorded the Grammy®-winning number one hit single, *Grazing in the Grass*, which sold over four million copies.

On June 15 and 16, 2016, at the Emperors Palace in Johannesburg, for the first time in over 50 years, Abdullah Ibrahim and Hugh Masekela reunited for two sold-out concerts, making a profound impact on the audiences and the artists themselves.

In 2017-2018, these legends of modern jazz and South African music planned on touring together in tribute to the legendary Jazz Epistles. Unfortunately, Hugh Masekela was forced to withdraw from participation in this tour due to a recurrence of cancer.

The important concert program has gone forward with Abdullah Ibrahim & Ekaya and special guest trumpet players presenting new arrangements of Jazz Epistles' original compositions including "Blues for Huey," "Scullery Department," "Carols Drive," "Vary - oo - Vum," "Dollars Moods," "Gafsa" and "Uku Janga Phambili," woven into a beautiful concert program with Abdullah Ibrahim's classic catalogue.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Abdullah Ibrahim (Piano)

Ibrahim, South Africa's most distinguished pianist and a world-respected master musician, was born in 1934 in Cape Town and baptized Adolph Johannes Brand. His early musical memories were of traditional African Khoi-san songs and the Christian hymns, gospel tunes and spirituals that he heard from his grandmother, who was pianist for the local African Methodist Episcopal church, and his mother, who led the choir. The Cape Town of his childhood was a melting-pot of cultural influences, and the young Dollar Brand, as he became known, was exposed to American jazz, township jive and Cape Malay music, as well as to classical music. Out of this blend of the secular and the religious, the traditional and the modern, developed the distinctive style, harmonies and musical vocabulary that are inimitably his own.

He began piano lessons at the age of seven and made his professional debut at fifteen, playing, and later recording, with such local groups as the Tuxedo Slickers. He was in the forefront of playing bebop with a Cape Town flavor, and 1958 saw the formation of the Dollar Brand Trio. His groundbreaking septet the Jazz Epistles, formed in 1959 (with saxophonist Kippie Moeketsi, trumpeter Hugh Masekela, trombonist Jonas Gwanga, bassist Johnny Gertze and drummer Makaya Ntshoko), recorded the first jazz album by South African musicians. That same year, he met and first performed with vocalist Sathima Bea Benjamin and they married six years later.

After the notorious Sharpeville massacre of 1960, mixed-race bands and audiences were defying the increasingly strict apartheid laws, and jazz symbolized resistance, so the government closed a number of clubs and harassed the musicians. Some members of the Jazz Epistles went to England with the musical *King Kong* and stayed in exile. These were difficult times in which to sustain musical development in South Africa. In 1962, with Nelson Mandela imprisoned and the African National Congress banned, Dollar Brand and Sathima Bea Benjamin left the country, joined later by the other trio members Gertze and Ntshoko, and took up a three-year contract at the Club Africana in Zürich. There, in 1963, Sathima Bea Benjamin persuaded Duke Ellington to listen to them play, which led to a recording session in Paris (*Duke Ellington presents the Dollar Brand Trio*) and invitations to perform at key European festivals as well as on television and radio during the next two years.

In 1965, the couple moved to New York. After appearing that year at the Newport Jazz Festival and Carnegie Hall, Dollar Brand was called upon in 1966 to substitute as leader of the Ellington Orchestra in five concerts. Then followed a six-month tour with the Elvin Jones Quartet. In 1967, he received a Rockefeller Foundation grant to attend the Juilliard School of Music. Being in the USA also afforded him the opportunity to interact with many progressive musicians including Don Cherry, Ornette Coleman, John Coltrane, Pharaoh Sanders, Cecil Taylor and Archie Shepp.

1968 was a turning point. Searching for spiritual harmony in an increasingly fractured life, Dollar Brand went back to Cape Town, where he converted to Islam, taking the name Abdullah Ibrahim, and in 1970, he made a pilgrimage to Mecca. Music and martial arts further reinforced the spiritual discipline he found. After a couple of years based in Swaziland, where he founded a music school, Ibrahim and his young family returned in 1973 to Cape Town, though he still toured internationally with his own large and small groups. In 1974, he recorded *Mannenberg – 'Is where it's happening'*, which soon became an unofficial national anthem for black South Africans. After the Soweto student uprising in 1976, he organized an illegal African National Congress benefit concert. Before long, he and his family left for America, to settle once again in New York.

Determined to manage his own affairs in America, Ibrahim founded the record company Ekapa in 1981 with his wife. The 1980s saw him involved with a range of artistic projects that depended on his music: Garth Fagan's ballet *Prelude* (first performed 1981), the Kalahari Liberation Opera (Vienna, 1982), and in 1983, a musical, *Cape Town, South Africa*, featuring the septet he formed that year, Ekaya. In 1987, he played a memorial concert for Marcus Garvey in London's Westminster Cathedral, and the following year, he played at the concert in Central Park, New York, commemorating the seventieth birthday of Nelson Mandela.

In 1990, Mandela, freed from prison, invited Ibrahim to come home to South Africa. The fraught emotions of reacclimatizing there are reflected in *Mantra Modes* (1991), the first recording with South African musicians since 1976, and in *Knysna Blue* (1993). He memorably performed at Mandela's inauguration in 1994.

Ibrahim has been the subject of several documentaries including Chris Austin's 1986 BBC film *A Brother with Perfect Timing* and *A Struggle for Love* by Ciro Cappellari (2004). He has also composed scores for film, including the award-winning soundtrack for Claire Denis's

Chocolat (1988), as well as for *No Fear, No Die* (1990) and Idrissa Ouedraogo's *Tilai* (1990). He was featured in the 2002 production *Amandla: A Revolution in Four-Part Harmony*.

For more than a quarter-century, Ibrahim has toured the world extensively, appearing at major concert halls, clubs and festivals, giving sell-out performances, as solo artist or with other renowned artists (notably Max Roach, Carlos Ward and Randy Weston). His collaborations with classical orchestras have resulted in acclaimed recordings, such as *African Suite* (1999, with members of the European Union Youth Orchestra) and the Munich Radio Philharmonic orchestra symphonic version, *African Symphony* (2001), which also featured the trio and the NDR Jazz Big Band.

Ibrahim celebrated his seventieth birthday in October 2004, which occasion was marked by the release of two CDs by Enja Records (the Munich-based label with which he has recorded for three decades): the compilation *A Celebration*, and *Re:Brahim*, his music remixed. His discography runs to well over a hundred album credits.

When not touring, he now divides his time between Cape Town and New York. In addition to composing and performing, he has started a South African production company, Masingita (miracle), and established a music academy, M7, offering courses in seven disciplines to educate young minds and bodies. Most recently, in 2006, he spearheaded the historic creation (backed by the South African Ministry of Arts and Culture) of the Cape Town Jazz Orchestra, an eighteen-piece big band, which is set to further strengthen the standing of South African music on the global stage.

A martial arts black belt with a lifelong interest in zen philosophy, he takes every opportunity to visit his master in private trips to Japan. In 2003, he performed charity concerts at temples in Kyoto and Shizuoka, the proceeds going to the M7 academy.

Abdullah Ibrahim remains at his zenith, as a musician and a tireless initiator of new projects. In his own words:

“some do it because they have to do it
we do it because we want to....so we do not require much sleep...
so we have to do it”

Keyon Harrold (Trumpet)

Raised from the fires of (now infamous) Ferguson, Missouri, Harrold has developed a reputation as one of the world's most sought-after, emotionally electric young trumpeters on the scene. A graduate from the Mannes Jazz Program at the New School University, Harrold is an eclectic trumpeter/music producer/arranger/songwriter who has been featured on nearly 100 albums ranging from jazz, R&B, pop, gospel, blues and hip hop. He has toured and recorded with or produced for some of the world's best artists and ensembles including Jay-Z, Beyoncé, Common, Erykah Badu and Lauryn Hill, to name a few. Harrold also has had numerous musical placements in film and TV including the Miles Davis Biopic *Miles Ahead*, directed by Don Cheadle, where he is featured as the trumpet sound of Don Cheadle playing Miles Davis. His album *The Mugician* was just released in September 2017.