

“I WAS PART OF THIS WHOLE NEW MOVEMENT”: A NARRATIVE STUDY OF THE
DRAKENSBERG BOYS’ CHOIR AND ITS ROLE IN NATION-BUILDING AT THE END OF
APARTHEID IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract

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This study investigates whether the Drakensberg Boys’ Choir played a role in nation-building in South Africa towards the end of and post-apartheid. The investigation included consulting the literature on the topic and three interviews with Drakensberg Boys Choir alums who were members of the school (and choir) during this time in South Africa. A brief overview of the history of South African music during apartheid is given for context. The narrative research design was chosen for this dissertation so that interviewees could tell their stories and have them presented as authentically as possible, in consideration of the sensitivity of the topic. Reviewing the narrative research design process (as advised by Creswell (2005:480), the interviews were restoried to help the reader make sense of the information collected. Themes were created from these restoried interviews to allow for a deeper understanding of the interviewees' experiences. The findings of this study are presented in the conclusion of this dissertation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|------------|
| ABSTRACT..... | III |
| ACKNOWLEDGMENTS | VI |
| CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |
| CONTEXT | 1 |
| PURPOSE STATEMENT..... | 3 |
| LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS | 4 |
| METHODOLOGY | 5 |
| SCOPES AND LIMITATIONS..... | 6 |
| CONCLUSION..... | 7 |
| CHAPTER 2: A BRIEF HISTORY OF MUSIC DURING APARTHEID, THE “GRACELAND” MOVEMENT AND THE DRAKIE STORY | 8 |
| THE BROEDERBOND AND ITS CONTROL ON MUSIC | 8 |
| THE “GRACELAND” MOVEMENT AND LADYSMITH BLACK MAMBAZO | 10 |
| THE DRAKENSBERG BOYS’ CHOIR SCHOOL AND NATION-BUILDING | 15 |
| CHRISTIAN ASHLEY-BOTHA’S STORY | 19 |
| THE DRAKENSBERG BOYS’ CHOIR REPERTOIRE FROM 1967-2000 | 21 |
| CHAPTER 3: THREE RESTORYED INTERVIEWS | 27 |
| BRIEF BIOGRAPHIES OF INTERVIEWEES..... | 27 |
| MZWANDILE BALA..... | 27 |
| NIEKIE VAN DER WALT..... | 28 |
| VAUGHAN VAN ZYL | 28 |
| MZWANDILE’S STORY: ‘DO I SPEAK HONESTLY, OR DO I SPEAK DIPLOMATICALLY?’ | 29 |
| NIEKIE’S STORY: ‘SO, NIEKIE, ARE YOU BECOMING COLORBLIND?’ | 38 |
| VAUGHAN’S STORY: ‘IT’S A MEMORY THAT IS SO FRESH IN MY MIND AS IF IT HAPPENED YESTERDAY.’ | 48 |
| CHAPTER 4: THEMES..... | 60 |
| INITIAL HEIGHTENED EMOTIONS | 61 |
| QUESTIONS OF TRANSFORMATION | 63 |
| ASHLEY-BOTHA’S SEMINAL ROLE IN THE SCHOOL | 68 |
| TRADITIONAL AFRICAN MUSIC..... | 70 |
| NATION-BUILDING..... | 73 |
| CONCLUSION..... | 75 |

| | |
|---|---------------|
| CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION..... | 77 |
| INSPIRATION FOR THIS RESEARCH..... | 77 |
| MY FINDINGS | 78 |
| SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY | 83 |
| THE ONGOING ‘STRUGGLE’ | 84 |
| FINAL THOUGHTS | 86 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 87 |
| ADDENDUM..... | 98 |
| RAW INTERVIEWS – INCLUDING PERMISSION ASKED AND GRANTED BY THE INTERVIEWEES TO USE THEIR RECORDED WORDS IN THIS DISSERTATION (HIGHLIGHTED IN YELLOW) | 98 |
| CLEARANCE FOR STUDY FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON HUMAN SUBJECTS DEPARTMENT | 135 |

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Context

As a boy (baritone) in the Drakensberg Boys Choir¹ of South Africa in 1998-2002, I remember the numerous occasions when we were called upon to sing for dignitaries at political events. I did not realize the importance of what was happening then; however, today, I understand we were a part of something much bigger than ourselves. As Niekie (a Drakie alum, 1995 and one of this study's participants) said in his interview, "You don't know what's actually happening at that age ... how proud am I? ... I was part of this whole new movement ... part of history." As I write this, I have been out of the school for twenty-one years, and I cannot help but reflect upon how Drakies may have offered—to a nation devastated by the effects of apartheid—renewed hope through the music we sang and the people's lives we touched.

But what was South Africa like leading up to my time at Drakies? During the 1980s, decades of racial discrimination and segregation, increasing pressure through world sanctions (International Legal Materials, 1966:370)², and civil unrest caused a tense political climate. To offer context, Nelson Mandela, in 1984, during a New Year's message, asked the people of South Africa to "make themselves ungovernable³," which led to intensified violent protests⁴. These violent protests lasted, for the most part, up until the early 1990s with Nelson Mandela's release. However, South Africa was not off the hook regarding rumors of anarchy and civil war. Knowing the consequences a civil war would have on South Africa, its people, and its already strained

¹ Referred to as Drakies from here on

² "United Nations: General Assembly Resolution on Apartheid in South Africa." *International Legal Materials* 5, no. 2 (1966): 369–73.

³ Sales, William., "A Black Scholar Interview: MAKING SOUTH AFRICA UNGOVERNABLE ANC STRATEGY FOR THE '80s," *The Black Scholar* 15, no. 6 (1984): 2–14, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41067113>.

⁴ Sales, "MAKING SOUTH AFRICA UNGOVERNABLE," 8.

economy because of international sanctions, the government, under the presidency of F.W. de Klerk, called on and funded PR companies and advertising agencies to create ‘National Peace Campaigns⁵’ to help smooth the transition to a new democratically elected government⁶. This led to the rise and push for peace campaigns in the early 1990s to soften the lead-up to the 1994 elections. Carmichael (2022:280)⁷ highlights one such campaign recruiting choirs in 1993⁸. She says:

The most ambitious event to be endorsed was [the] ‘Peace Train.’ Spoornet⁹ ... provided a sixteen-carriage sleeper train to take [a] hundred-strong multicultural children’s choir (entitled ‘When Voices Meet’) and the internationally known group ‘Ladysmith Black Mambazo’ on a ten-day concert tour¹⁰.

Carmichael suggests the campaign used choirs because it visually represented the gathering of people for one purpose and encouraged people from all races to gather in peace to listen as one body to a performance. One might consider this idea of gathering people for peace through music as a form of nation-building.

⁵ Carmichael, Liz, and Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, “Mobilizing the People, Making Peace Cool,” In *Peacemaking and Peacebuilding in South Africa*, 269, The National Peace Accord, 1991-1994, Boydell & Brewer, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv136c046.23>.

⁶ Carmichael, “Making Peace Cool,” 269.

⁷ Carmichael, “Making Peace Cool,” 280.

⁸ Carmichael, “Making Peace Cool,” 279.

⁹ The national railway company in South Africa.

¹⁰ Carmichael, “Making Peace Cool,” 279. Yudkoff, Ambigay. *Activism through Music during the Apartheid Era and beyond : When Voices Meet*. Lexington Books, 2021, 12.

Purpose Statement

Through this study, I aim to explore and examine if Drakies played a role in nation-building towards the end of apartheid (1994) and the years after apartheid, and if they did, how they played a role through three interviews with Drakie alumni who were attending the school during that time. Through these interviews, I aimed to ask questions that would help me understand each individual's unique experiences at Drakies and what it was like singing in a celebrity choir during a time of fragility and tense political shifts in power in South Africa. My ultimate aim was to determine whether, and if so, how Drakies played a role in nation-building.

For this study, it is necessary to define what the researcher of this dissertation considers to be nation-building because the term 'nation-building' could take on many definitions. South Africa, towards the end of apartheid – the 1980s and the 1990s – was a divided nation because of racial tensions and distrust, lack of fairness in the judicial system, and lack of equal access to educational and governmental institutions. Consequently, there was a need to create a healthy nation built on trust, understanding, fairness, and equal access. This endeavor to create and foster elements that might heal a divided nation is what I call nation-building.

For this dissertation, nation-building is synonymous with community-building, which is the striving to create a community among people of different races in which their cultural heritages may be freely expressed and celebrated. It must also be said that this dissertation is a discussion on national unity, not nationalism. I am attempting to prove that Drakies had a small role to play in working towards national unity or nation-building in South Africa. From my perspective, and as a Drakie alum, Drakies played a role in nation-building because they served as an example of national unity by looking racially diverse, already early on in the 1990s, when South Africa was divided, and because they accepted their first black boy in the 1980s when it was still controversial

to do so. In my view, these aspects reveal Drakies to be a symbol of what many South Africans were hoping to achieve in the 1980s and 1990s. The mission of my dissertation was to learn about more perspectives beyond myself- from people directly involved at Drakies during this pivotal time.

Literature Review and Research Questions

I first conducted a literature review to answer whether Drakies played a role in nation-building and to assist me in formulating effective questions to ask my interview participants¹¹. There is not much written on this topic; however, through gathering information from Christian Ashley Botha's book¹², consulting various articles found on the internet, and reviewing the content of the texts and melodies chosen for the *Shosholozza: An African Adventure*¹³ album released in 1995, I was able to conclude that the literature I collected does point to Drakies having a role to play in nation-building.

Njanji (2022)¹⁴, writes that Drakies represents hope in present-day South Africa (and implies the school did work towards nation-building in the past) because of its racial diversity and repertoire, which includes Western Art and traditional African music. *The Presidency: Republic of South Africa* website¹⁵ regards Christian Ashley-Botha, the artistic director and lead conductor of Drakies during the years 1981-2006, as a friend of the struggle for freedom by allowing black boys into the school when it was against the law to do so and for visiting Nelson Mandela on Robben

¹¹ The full list of questions for each participant of the study can be found in the Addendum, as well as the raw data collected through the interviews.

¹² Durban: Just Done Productions, 2014.

¹³ The Drakensberg Boys choir. *Shosholozza: An African Adventure*, various traditional African music, conducted by Christian Ashley-Botha, recorded 1995, CDDM007, compact disc.

¹⁴ "In Troubled South Africa, a Boys' Choir Gives Cause for Hope - Digital Journal," accessed November 16, 2023. <https://www.digitaljournal.com/entertainment/in-troubled-south-africa-a-boys-choir-gives-cause-for-hope/article>.

¹⁵ "Christian Ashley-Botha (1944 -) | The Presidency," accessed November 16, 2023. <https://www.thepresidency.gov.za/national-orders/recipient/christian-ashley-botha-1944>.

Island while he was still in prison¹⁶. Another digital article on AfricaNews (2022)¹⁷ describes how the public views Drakies positively, seeing them as future leaders who will “save our country.”

Methodology

I chose the narrative research design as the most appropriate research method for this study. I wanted to tell the individual stories of my participants as accurately and sensitively as possible. Squire *et al* (2013:1)¹⁸ says, “Narratives carry traces of human lives that we want to understand.” Atkinson (2010:92)¹⁹ goes as far as to say that the narrative study is a “democratic form of research” where the voices of study participants are given importance. Creswell (2005:474)²⁰ tells us a narrative research design is used if your research “follows a chronology of events” to tell an individual's story. Throughout the interview process, I asked questions that fit into the timeline between 1980 and the opening of the country to the broader world via the 1995 Rugby World Cup²¹ in South Africa. My specific task was to look for clues as to whether Drakies played a role in nation-building.

Creswell (2005:480)²² advises that after the interviews have been completed, the first step of processing the data is ‘restorying,’ where the researcher retells the story in their own words. This allows the data to begin to take structure and assists in making sense to the reader. There are several methods Creswell (2005:480, 482)²³ identifies that a researcher may use to restory an interview to

¹⁶ Another uncommon thing to do as a white man in South Africa.

¹⁷ “South Africa’s Drakensberg Boys School Choir Performs Live | AfricaNews,” accessed November 16, 2023. <https://www.africanews.com/2022/12/21/south-africas-drakensberg-boys-school-choir-performs-live/>.

¹⁸ Squire *et al*, “Introduction,” 1.

¹⁹ Atkinson, “Teachers Responding,” 92.

²⁰ Creswell, “Narrative Research Designs,” 474.

²¹ Hosted in South Africa, the 1995 Rugby World cup is considered a major event for positive nation-building in the country. See Chapter 3, Niekie’s interview for more details regarding his experiences of the event.

²² Creswell, “Narrative Research Designs,” 480.

²³ Creswell, “Narrative Research Designs,” 480, 482.

sort the information chronologically. I chose to restory Mzwandile's interview by sorting each sentence or idea into one of the "setting, characters, actions, problems, and resolution" categories Creswell (2005:482)²⁴ suggests because Mzwandile would often add information about a previous question we had already discussed while talking about the question I had just asked. Restorying is arranging the raw data from the interview into the style of a novel or something close to it²⁵. Restorying the data this way helped me gather similar information to put together. I chose another method of restorying for Niekie's and Vaughan's interviews because of the topics they spoke about most²⁶. This method included sorting data under headings, namely, *Interaction* (involving personal and social interactions within the story), *Continuity* (the past, present, and future of the story/stories they told), and *Situation* (which involves offering context through the places mentioned in the story).

Scopes and Limitations

The scope of this study will be limited to a short historical background offering context of the South African political climate in the 1980s and the early 1990s, events affecting or influencing Drakies during the 1980s and 1990s, and whether Drakies played a role in nation-building, and if so, how, through a literature review and three interviews with Drakie alumni. This study will not include a large-scale history of apartheid, its laws, and its consequences. This study will not focus on South African music or choir music during apartheid in a broad context.

²⁴ Creswell, "Narrative Research Designs," 482.

²⁵ Creswell, "Narrative Research Designs," 480.

²⁶ Niekie spoke a great deal about the 1995 Rugby World Cup and Vaughan elaborated largely on the school's evolving traditional African music program.

Conclusion

As an adult, thinking back to my time at Drakies, I believe I was part of an organization that played a role in nation-building. By collecting three interviews of Drakie alums who were present during these times of change in the school and the country, I aimed to answer whether Drakies played a role in nation-building. After ‘restorying’ these interviews, I created five themes to present as possible answers to the problem statement. Before delving into these themes, the reader must grasp the sensitive political atmosphere of the 1980s and early 1990s in South Africa to understand the circumstances surrounding Drakies. Chapter 2, which follows, offers a brief and concise history of the apartheid regime’s attempt to control music, how Paul Simon’s “Graceland” became a voice for liberation, and the Drakie story as told through the literature review.

Chapter 2: A Brief History of Music During Apartheid, the “Graceland” Movement and the Drakie Story

The restless political situation in 1980s South Africa was the climax of subsequent events that began at the start of the twentieth century. This chapter touches on some of these events and the actions they caused so that the reader may understand the political environment Drakies found itself in during the 1980s. For contextual purposes, I chose to discuss the *Broederbond* and their power in South African society, the case of Paul Simon’s “Graceland” and the argument surrounding it, and finally, the Drakie story. With the Drakie story, I include literature written about the school, the leadership who was the driving force for change, and the Drakie album *Shosholozza: An African Adventure* released in 1995, representing the development in diversity of repertoire in the choir program.

The Broederbond and its control on music

At the turn of the twentieth century and the end of the Anglo-Boer War in 1901, the *Orange and Transvaal Boer Republics*²⁷ were left desolate and defeated. Horatio Herbert Kitchener, a senior officer in the British Army, had instilled a “scorched earth policy” (A policy by which the British, under the command of Kitchener, burned farms and killed livestock to starve the *Boers* into submission). He also ordered *Boer* women and children, including black Africans, to be put in inhumane concentration camps. Women and children were left without adequate food, proper shelter, medicine, and other basic needs, causing hundreds of thousands of people to die, all to

²⁷ The *Orange* and *Transvaal Boer* Republics were two independent Afrikaner states within present-day South Africa before the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1901). After the defeat of the Afrikaners in the Anglo-Boer War, the two states were annexed into the British Union, which later became the country we know as South Africa.

force the *Boers* to surrender²⁸. After their surrender, the *Boers* were looking for ways to unify themselves again with the desire to be free from British rule eventually, and through this desire for freedom, the *Broederbond* was formed.

Beavon *et al* (1980:98)²⁹ tell us the *Broederbond*, translated as the Bond of Brothers, was established in 1918 by disgruntled Afrikaner leaders (O'Meara, 1977:156-157)³⁰ who were bitter towards the British for committing genocide, war crimes, and the war's outcome. The *Broederbond* had to be an “underground” organization because a political body not authorized by or conformed to the Union³¹ would be considered an act of rebellion towards the crown. The *Broederbond* was also formed as an elitist group with specific joining criteria. Listing these criteria, Beavon *et al* (1980:99)³² write:

Recruitment is strictly controlled on a cell-quota basis. Membership is open only to White Afrikaans males, aged 25 years or older who subscribe to the Protestant faith, are clean of character and firm principle, particularly in the maintenance of an Afrikaans identity, and who accept South Africa as the only fatherland. The aspirant Broeder will strive for the perpetuation of a separate Afrikaner nation with its own language and culture, give preference to Afrikaners and other ‘well-disposed’ people in economic, political and professional spheres, uphold the Afrikaans language at home, work, and in the community at large, and be both able and willing to take an active, regular and loyal part in all the organization’s activities³³ (O'Meara, 1977:157)³⁴.

²⁸ Read Wessels, André, “The Anglo-Boer War (1899 – 1902) and Its Traumatic Consequences,” In *Breaking Intergenerational Cycles of Repetition*, edited by Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, 1st ed., 160–73, A Global Dialogue on Historical Trauma and Memory, Verlag Barbara Budrich, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvdf03jc.14> for more historical background on the subject.

²⁹ Pirie, G. H., C. M. Rogerson, and K. S. O. Beavon, “Covert Power in South Africa: The Geography of the Afrikaner Broederbond,” *Area* 12, no. 2 (1980): 97–104, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20001569>.

³⁰ O'Meara, Dan, “The Afrikaner Broederbond 1927-1948: Class Vanguard of Afrikaner Nationalism,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 3, no. 2 (1977): 156–86, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2636337>.

³¹ Which was now the name of all the colonies under British rule, including the *Boer* republics.

³² Beavon *et al*, “Covert Power in South Africa,” 99.

³³ Beavon *et al*, “Covert Power in South Africa,” 99.

³⁴ O'Meara, Dan, “The Afrikaner Broederbond,” 156-157.

The *Broederbond* controlled every aspect of society, including music, and who could practice it. The Director of Music of the North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus (2011-2012), informed us in a department meeting that he was not permitted as a music undergraduate to play any instrument except the recorder. It was only when he was accepted at the University of North Texas in the United States of America in the early nineties that he was given the option of playing any instrument he wanted. He chose to specialize in saxophone. Walton (2004:73)³⁵, although not directly saying so, supports the above by implying that all music was controlled by the *Broederbond*, or the FAK³⁶, one of its branches, who decided which music was taught in schools and who would be allowed to practice and perform it. Walton (2004:73)³⁷ goes as far as to say that even the apartheid National Anthem, *Die Stem*³⁸ had strict parameters of how it was allowed to be performed.

The information above suggests that the music that the *Broederbond* deemed as music was reserved for white Afrikaner South Africans, and anything else was unworthy of the ‘white elite.’ This *Broederbond* ‘elitist’ definition of music created the conditions for protest and rebellion, which was apparent in the 1980s South African music scene.

The “Graceland” Movement and Ladysmith Black Mambazo

The 1980s were characterized by ongoing, substantive protests organized by anti-Apartheid organizations. This resulted in the announcement of numerous “states of emergency” by the ruling party and authors of apartheid, the National Party. Even as a young child, I remember discussions

³⁵ Walton, Chris, “Bond of Broeders: Anton Hartman and Music in an Apartheid State,” *The Musical Times* 145, no. 1887 (2004): 73, <https://doi.org/10.2307/4149148>.

³⁶ Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurvereniginge translated as “Federation of the Afrikaans Cultural Union.”

³⁷ Walton, “Bond of Brothers,” 73.

³⁸ Directly translated as “The Voice.”

my family would have over the dinner table about censored music. I was told at that time that censored music was not worth listening to because it supported a “terrorist” movement. Regardless of these kinds of opinions on censored music in 1980s South Africa, there is one case that stands out as having a significant influence on the anti-apartheid movement- that of Paul Simon’s song “Graceland.”

It must first be understood, however, that Simon specifically says he did not intend for “Graceland” to become part of a political movement. In a 2012 interview³⁹, he says, “My respect for these musicians was not to go and stand up and say, ‘Let me describe your plight and your burden ... I’ll do that for you.’ My idea was: ‘They play their best, I’m gonna play my best’ ... I didn’t come in here promising to do anything other than make a really good record,” and “The other part of it was just trying to make a really great record with a bunch of really great musicians and then bringing them out and then playing around the world, and what you saw was ... a white guy playing perfectly comfortably with black musicians, which was exactly the opposite of what apartheid stood for.”

Meintjies (1990:37)⁴⁰, however, argues that “Graceland” for some South Africans (white and black), became a symbol of collaboration, not only in styles of music but also for “sociopolitical experiences,” regardless of Paul Simon’s intentions for the record. “Graceland” awakened awareness in South Africa and internationally. She points out, “Indeed, the international success of *Graceland* seems to have brought both attention and value to South African music domestically and globally⁴¹.” She also states that the international success of “Graceland” offered oppressed

³⁹ Paul Simon, “Graceland: were the songs political?” YouTube Video, September 6, 2012, https://youtu.be/l6dSrsbMD-4?si=u4YdFjK5NoTfMh_y.

⁴⁰ Meintjies, Louise, “Paul Simon’s Graceland, South Africa, and the Mediation of Musical Meaning,” *Ethnomusicology* 34, no. 1 (1990): 37–73, <https://doi.org/10.2307/852356>.

⁴¹ Meintjies, “Graceland,” 62.

South African black musicians a platform to voice the injustices of apartheid. Meintjies (1990:61)⁴² writes:

Black South African commentary that supports the project, supports it largely because of the international exposure it offers. Politically, the opportunity an international project like *Graceland* affords them to expose the apartheid through song, talk, interviews, and other promotional activities is obvious⁴³.

Hamm (1986:299)⁴⁴ disagrees with Meintjies and argues that if the record had anything to do with the struggle against apartheid, then it would financially aid the oppressed black community and their plight against apartheid in South Africa. He plainly says the “venture had nothing to do with the on-going struggle for liberation⁴⁵,” because the actual cost of the record was too expensive for black consumers.

Collaboration between cultures and their music styles in “Graceland” was not met enthusiastically by all groups in South Africa. Meintjies (1990:50-51)⁴⁶ points out that black media critiqued “Graceland” as yet another approach by colonizers to meddle in African affairs, or “colonization to liberation,” as they call it. Another critique is the power imbalance between Paul Simon and the black South African musicians he employed for this record. This power imbalance can again be seen as an example of indirect colonialism, but with a more modern approach. Erlmann (1994:175)⁴⁷ writes, “Critiques ... are of course indispensable if we are to understand the very real power process at stake in the transnational production of difference.” Meintjies

⁴² Meintjies, “Graceland,” 62.

⁴³ Meintjies, “Graceland,” 61.

⁴⁴ Hamm, Charles, “Graceland Revisited,” *Popular Music* 8, no. 3 (1989): 299–304.

⁴⁵ Hamm, “Graceland Revisited,” 299.

⁴⁶ Meintjies, “Graceland,” 50.

⁴⁷ Erlmann, Veit, “‘Africa Civilised, Africa Uncivilised’: Local Culture, World System and South African Music,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 20, no. 2 (1994): 165–79.

(1990:47)⁴⁸ lists examples of the power imbalances they believe are apparent with the “Graceland” collaboration, such as Simon not distributing the money equally with the other collaborative artists, which was made from sales, the music and arrangements not being correctly credited to the black musicians, Simon holding sole copyright to the recordings; and Simon having the most say in how the music process, or “musicking,” is made.

Part of the argument in Simon’s defense is the fact that he paid for black artists such as Ladysmith Black Mambazo and Stimela to fly to the U.S. and record, whereafter he also funded a world tour with these groups at his own expense. According to Hamm (1989:299)⁴⁹, Simon and his management team also believe the exposure they offered allowed Ladysmith Black Mambazo to “reach greater subsequent profits from live and television performances, and recordings released outside of South Africa.” Hamm (1989:300)⁵⁰ reveals, however, that Ladysmith Black Mambazo flourished in South Africa before Simon came on the scene because each group member had multiple luxury homes and vehicles.

As a boy in Drakies, I remember collaborations with Ladysmith Black Mambazo or singing at the same performance event but separately. I remember in 2000, Drakies traveled to the outskirts of *Escort*⁵¹ to sing for Joseph Shabalala’s (the lead singer of the Ladysmith Black Mambazo) birthday event. Drakies has always had a close relationship with Ladysmith Black Mambazo. The group is known to be the ideal example of the *isicathamiya*, having perfected the genre. In short, *Isicathamiya* is a long-standing Zulu vocal music tradition originating in the early twentieth

⁴⁸ Meintjies, “Graceland,” 50.

⁴⁹ Hamm, “Graceland Revisited,” 299.

⁵⁰ Hamm, “Graceland Revisited,” 299.

⁵¹ A small town in the KwaZulu-Natal province also mentioned in Mzwandile’s interview.

century. Erlmann *et al* (1989:35)⁵² describe the genre as “[Westernized⁵³] choir arrangements of traditional songs ... [with] introduced uniforms and a light touch of choreography called *istep*.”

“Homeless,” one of the songs recorded for “Graceland,” is a perfect example of *isicathamiya*, according to Erlmann’s (1989:35)⁵⁴ definition, however, mixed with Simon’s American folk-rock-pop-soul genre. “Homeless” is considered by Meintjies (1990:40)⁵⁵ as the song “most collaboratively conceived” by Simon and Ladysmith Black Mambazo on the “Graceland” record (Bennighof, 1993/1994:231)⁵⁶, because it was a song they created together with English and Zulu words while assembling the melody one bit at a time. Meintjies (1990:40)⁵⁷ suggests that Simon goes at length to describe how “Homeless” was conceived and created because he found an identity through the song which he wanted to put forward as an image to the public. Erlmann (1994:176)⁵⁸ describes this as Simon assigning the responsibility “on *Graceland* to construct an authentic identity.”

Concerning the argument about identity, Meintjies (1990:51)⁵⁹ addresses a dilemma about ‘white identity’ in South Africa, which is still debated today (Erlmann: 1994:176)⁶⁰. The excerpt to follow resonates deeply with me because I, too, find myself in a conundrum, not being sure of where I fit in culturally in South Africa as a Caucasian Afrikaner, an immediate Dutch immigrant, and a person with indigenous South African roots⁶¹. They write:

⁵² Shabalala, Joseph, and Veit Erlmann, “A Conversation with Joseph Shabalala of Ladysmith Black Mambazo. Aspects of African Performers’ Life Stories,” *The World of Music* 31, no. 1 (1989): 31–58, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43562764>.

⁵³ With Westernized harmonic structures added to traditional songs, i.e. I-IV-I-V.

⁵⁴ Erlmann, “Joseph Shabalala,” 35.

⁵⁵ Meintjies, “Graceland,” 40.

⁵⁶ Bennighof, James, “Fluidity in Paul Simon’s ‘Graceland’: On Text and Music in a Popular Song,” *College Music Symposium* 33/34 (1993): 212–36.

⁵⁷ Meintjies, “Graceland,” 40.

⁵⁸ Erlmann, “‘Africa Civilised, Africa Uncivilised,’” 176.

⁵⁹ Meintjies, “Graceland,” 51.

⁶⁰ Erlmann, “‘Africa Civilised, Africa Uncivilised,’” 165-179.

⁶¹ I had a genetic test done, and the results showed I was close to 10% African or African Indigenous.

White South Africans share one reason for their favoring of Graceland. Irrespective of their political persuasions, they have embraced *Graceland* because of the link it offers them to indigenous Black traditions. By expressing a claim on these traditions, they are able to legitimate their own identity as local and to construct a history for this local identity⁶².

After conducting these interviews⁶³, I cannot help but ask if Drakies has attempted to find its identity and place in South Africa by adopting a traditional African music program⁶⁴. Regardless of whether this is true, adopting a traditional African program has put the choir school on the map with high-ranking politicians and successful local artists.

The Drakensberg Boys' Choir School and nation-building

The literature I found on Drakies covers important information about their political connections, racial diversity, and how the public perceives them, all pointing to the choir school's active role in nation-building in the past, present, and future. One of the main aspects pointed out in the literature is that Drakies look and sound diverse because of the racial diversity people see when they watch them perform, alongside the inclusion of traditional African repertoire, which they hear apart from the Western Art music canon.

In their article, *In Troubled South Africa, a Boys' Choir Gives Cause for Hope*, Njanji⁶⁵ describes the Drakies as of 2022 as "One [of] South Africa's finest cultural exports — [it is one of the] most racially and culturally diverse chorale, and a beacon of hope in a troubled country." They

⁶² Meintjies, "Graceland," 51.

⁶³ See Chapters 3 & 4 for interviews and themes.

⁶⁴ The word program will synonymously be used throughout this dissertation with the "set."

⁶⁵ AFP, "In Troubled South Africa, a Boys' Choir Gives Cause for Hope," Digital Journal, December 23, 2022, <https://www.digitaljournal.com/entertainment/in-troubled-south-africa-a-boys-choir-gives-cause-for-hope/article>.

interviewed several boys for this recent article, which included white middle-class boys and boys of color from areas with fewer resources in South Africa, such as Mitchell's Plain in Cape Town, showing the inclusion of racial and economic diversity in the school⁶⁶. They also interviewed Vaughan van Zyl, one of the participants for this study and the current conductor of the choir, who said, "Give these boys anything classical, pop, African traditional music from other countries — different languages ... sacred music, secular music, they can do it all⁶⁷." While noting many positive aspects of the approach of the school, they choose to conclude their article by putting the onus on the Drakie boys to continue their work in nation-building, who "will have to find a way forward," to heal the country from its crime-riddled society and trauma caused by apartheid⁶⁸.

On the website, *The Presidency: Republic of South Africa*⁶⁹, Christian Ashley-Botha⁷⁰ (the leading and most influential conductor of Drakies during apartheid) is credited with playing a significant role in the musical development of famous South African black singers, namely the Drakies' trained Bala Brothers – Zwai⁷¹, Loyiso, and Phelo Bala⁷². The Bala Brothers are again mentioned in a blurb⁷³, advertising their tour to New York in 2015, offering insight into the multifaceted musical training they received at Drakies. The blurb says, "thrilling audiences with their fusion of operatically trained voices, rich harmonies, and traditional South African melodies and rhythms." This statement also validates Vaughan's confidence as expressed in Njanji's

⁶⁶ AFP, "Boys' Choir Gives Cause for Hope."

⁶⁷ AFP, "Boys' Choir Gives Cause for Hope."

⁶⁸ AFP, "Boys' Choir Gives Cause for Hope."

⁶⁹ "Christian Ashley-Botha (1944 -) | The Presidency," Accessed May 16, 2023,

<https://www.thepresidency.gov.za/national-orders/recipient/christian-ashley-botha-1944>.

⁷⁰ Christian-Ashley Botha is mentioned below and also in Chapters 3 and 4. He is considered to have led the change at Drakies during the 1980s and early 1990s.

⁷¹ Zwai, known as Mzwandile, is one of the participants for this study.

⁷² "Christian Ashley-Botha (1944 -) | The Presidency."

⁷³ Warner Classics, "South Africa's Bala Brothers To Release Self-Titled CD/DVD On Warner Classics In March 2015: THREE BROTHERS BATTLED APARTHEID TO BECOME FIRST BLACK MEMBERS OF WORLD-FAMOUS DRAKENSBURG CHOIR," January 28, 2015, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1648610259>.

(2022)⁷⁴ interview about Drakie boys having the ability to sing any style of music, however virtuosic.

The Presidency: Republic of South Africa website also recognized Christian Ashley-Botha for vying for peace during a fragile time in South African history when the country was divided and on the brink of civil war⁷⁵. The article tells the remarkable story of how a relationship formed between Drakies and Nelson Mandela:

In 1984, the choir descended on the then notorious prison, Robben Island, where Nelson Mandela, along with many others, was a political prisoner. Ashley-Botha and the choir had decided to honour one of the most revered freedom fighters with a surprise performance, in acknowledgement of his unequivocal struggle for a non-segregated and non-discriminatory country. They only got as far as the prison officials, and were predictably refused permission to see Mandela⁷⁶.

The same article supports Njanji's (2022)⁷⁷ implication of Drakies, or more so in this case Ashley-Botha, for being a medium for nation-building by saying that the Presidency has confidence in Ashley-Botha's ongoing plight to draw people together locally and globally through the peaceful message heard in the music he makes⁷⁸.

Another article pointing at Drakies as nation-builders in current times is *South Africa's Drakensberg Boys School Choir Performs Live* on AfricaNews (2022)⁷⁹, which describes Drakies as "South Africa's most racially and culturally diverse choir" while strategically mentioning their

⁷⁴ AFP, "Boys' Choir Gives Cause for Hope."

⁷⁵ "Christian Ashley-Botha (1944 -) | The Presidency."

⁷⁶ "Christian Ashley-Botha (1944 -) | The Presidency."

⁷⁷ AFP, "Boys' Choir Gives Cause for Hope."

⁷⁸ "Christian Ashley-Botha (1944 -) | The Presidency."

⁷⁹ AfricaNews. "South Africa's Drakensberg Boys School Choir Performs Live." Africanews, December 21, 2022. <https://www.africanews.com/2022/12/21/south-africas-drakensberg-boys-school-choir-performs-live/>.

performance of Vivaldi's Gloria in 2021⁸⁰. The article quotes Lungelwa Dlulane, the mother of one of the boys, saying, "They are going to be beautiful, powerful, [and] influential men in the future that will just save our country."⁸¹ This comment shows that people still see the choir as a beacon of hope and nation-building in South Africa, even 30 years after the first democratic election. However, the perception of Drakies as nation-builders goes beyond South Africa.

On a Japanese website for *Min-On*⁸², a Japanese organization that imports performers and productions from around the world, one author boasts that Drakies accepted its first black boy as a scholar six years before apartheid ended in 1994, with the first democratic election. The term 'Rainbow Nation' (a term Desmond Tutu used to describe the people of South Africa) is associated with the perception of Drakies, as the report says, "Today, [the] Drakensberg Boys Choir is a beloved South African asset, and their fame as the 'Singing Ambassadors of the Rainbow Nation' extends globally⁸³." *Min-On* formed a relationship with Drakies through the choir school's association with Nelson Mandela. The report says that *Min-On* wanted to promote cultural exchange between Japan and South Africa⁸⁴. Drakies relationship with Nelson Mandela inspired the organization to invite the choir school over to tour Japan in 1997, and then for many other years - *Min-On's* relationship with Drakies is still ongoing today⁸⁵. As a Drakie boy, I traveled and performed in Japan in 2001 and 2002. The article shows that *Min-On* also has a diplomatic relationship with the South African government and sought permission in 2017 through the South African embassy to invite Drakies to tour Japan for the fourth time⁸⁶.

⁸⁰ AfricaNews, "South Africa's Drakensberg Boys School Choir Performs Live."

⁸¹ AfricaNews, "South Africa's Drakensberg Boys School Choir Performs Live."

⁸² "Singing Ambassadors of the Rainbow Nation Crossed a Mountain of Struggles | English - Min-On Website," Accessed February 13, 2023, <https://www.min-on.org/1722/singing-ambassadors-of-the-rainbow-nation-crossed-a-mountain-of-struggles/>.

⁸³ *Min-On*, "Singing Ambassadors."

⁸⁴ *Min-On*, "Singing Ambassadors."

⁸⁵ *Min-On*, "Singing Ambassadors."

⁸⁶ *Min-On*, "Singing Ambassadors."

Christian Ashley-Botha's Story

Christian Ashley-Botha was born in 1994, in Cape town. His education includes the Royal College of Church Music in London and graduating with a Bachelor of Music (Honors) degree from the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein, South Africa. Ashley-Botha was appointed Director of Music at the Drakensberg Boys Choir in 1981 and remained there until his retirement in 2006. In September 2006, Ashley-Botha was awarded 'The Order of *Ikhamanga*⁸⁷,' for significantly contributing to the South African choral scene⁸⁸.

In his book, *Drakie Stories: Stories from the Drakensberg Boys Choir School 1981-2006*⁸⁹, Ashley-Botha tells us his account of the acceptance of "The first boy of colour" while offering insight into the fragile political climate in South Africa at the time. Ashley-Botha (2014:51)⁹⁰ writes:

It was 1986, at the height of the National Government's attempts to plug the holes in its apartheid system. The Special Branch had unlimited powers and the period of detention-without-trial had been increased for the third time. It appeared to the liberals that the country was doomed⁹¹.

He tells us that before the first black boy was admitted, the Chairman of the Board of the school was tasked to prepare the parents for the new change. The Chairman attempted to inform the parents of this change diplomatically, to not "ruffle any feathers," however, the news was received with mixed feelings among parent audience. Some parents vocally and enthusiastically

⁸⁷ The *Ikhamanga* is an indigenous South African flower, originally found in the Eastern Cape.

⁸⁸ Ashley-Botha, Christian, *Drakie Stories: Stories from the Drakensberg Boys Choir School 1981-2006*, (Durban: Just Done Productions, 2014), v.

⁸⁹ Ashley-Botha, *Drakie Stories*, 51.

⁹⁰ Ashley-Botha, *Drakie Stories*, 51.

⁹¹ Ashley-Botha, *Drakie Stories*, 51.

approved, while others were visibly upset by the news. Ashley-Botha describes the situation by saying, "It was a thorny issue." While the Chairman was still busy speaking, one of the fathers abruptly stood up, and raised his voice while disapprovingly asking for transparency about when they would let black boys in the school.

Ashley-Botha (2014:53-54)⁹² says the school needed to adapt to the times and open its doors to black learners. To do this, he asked for help from one of the more progressive parent couples. The father sang in a church choir and knew of a boy of color with a strong voice in the congregation. The boy was accepted into the school through an audition process but was met with a resistant parent body who felt the child's hygiene and character traits were not up to standard. Ashley-Botha (2014:53-54)⁹³ implies that the parents used this excuse to strengthen their case to expel the boy from the school.

Through a voice competition hosted by the school in Johannesburg, called the "The Golden Voices," a young black boy who won the competition was invited to attend the school. His name is Mzwandile Bala⁹⁴. Two of his other brothers also attended the school, Loyiso, and Phelo Bala⁹⁵, and have made household names for themselves in the South African music industry. Ashley-Botha (2014:55)⁹⁶ tells us that although Mzwandile was "met with strong resistance," the senior members of the school (mostly aged fifteen) took it upon themselves to act as his "bodyguards" so that Mzwandile could feel more comfortable at school. During his interview, Mzwandile discussed his initial experiences at Drakies in more detail (see Chapters 3 and 4).

⁹² Ashley-Botha, *Drakie Stories*, 53-54.

⁹³ Ashley-Botha, *Drakie Stories*, 53-54.

⁹⁴ Although Zwai Bala is used in the book and is his stage name, he has asked to be called Mzwandile for this dissertation.

⁹⁵ "Christian Ashley-Botha (1944 -) | The Presidency." Warner Classics, "South Africa's Bala Brothers To Release Self-Titled CD/DVD."

⁹⁶ Ashley-Botha, *Drakie Stories*, 55.

The Drakensberg Boys' Choir repertoire from 1967-2000

Researching the history of Drakie's repertoire, I found a website that has logged most of the records and albums from 1967 to 2000. This website⁹⁷ offers a detailed list of pieces, songs, and other music recorded during this period. The music recorded by Drakies until the 1980s is Western European Art or Afrikaans White music, with a few exceptions to traditional black South African music.

Typical choices of Western Art music canon include pieces⁹⁸ ranging from G.P. Palestrina (various items taken from his masses), H. Purcell (Hear My Prayer), J.S. Bach (Jesu Joy of Man's Desiring), G.F. Händel (various excerpts from The Messiah), J. F. Haydn (*Kleine Orgelsolo-Messe*), W.A. Mozart (Laudate Dominum) and L. Bernstein (Chichester Psalms or excerpts from Westside story). Afrikaans White music selections include but are not limited to, music from P. de Villiers, S. le Roux Marais, and other traditional folk Afrikaans White music, which can be found in the FAK⁹⁹. The above are only typical examples of the kind of Western Art and Afrikaans music Drakies included in their repertoire.

However, the 1995 Drakie album release, *Shosholozza: An African Adventure*¹⁰⁰, has strictly only traditional African music¹⁰¹. The album was released in 1995 after Nelson Mandela's presidential inauguration in 1994, and it offers some insight into the social change in the school and the country. The discography¹⁰² previously mentioned shows that most of the music recorded by Drakies till then was from the Western Art canon and Afrikaans music. To have a whole album

⁹⁷ Discogs, "Drakensberg Boys Choir," Accessed May 18, 2023, <https://www.discogs.com/artist/3971077-Drakensberg-Boys-Choir>.

⁹⁸ These examples are only a drop within a drop of an ocean of Western Art music Drakies have performed.

⁹⁹ Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurvereniginge translated as "Federation of the Afrikaans Cultural Union."

¹⁰⁰ *Shosholozza - An African Adventure*, 2020, <https://open.spotify.com/album/4eE6eGlyQeT6uBhE9ALxb1>.

¹⁰¹ It is important to note that the album includes traditional music from Southern Africa, which includes countries neighboring South Africa, such as Namibia and Zimbabwe.

¹⁰² Discogs, "Drakensberg Boys Choir," Accessed May 18, 2023, <https://www.discogs.com/artist/3971077-Drakensberg-Boys-Choir>.

dedicated to traditional African songs was a huge change and set a precedent for other white choirs in the country. While it might be argued that Drakies simply changed their repertoire to appear more progressive after the election, it could also be inferred that releasing an album of entirely traditional African songs so soon after Mandela's election was a form of nation-building. The album must have been in the process of being recorded and produced, even during significant political changes in the country. It is impossible to find all the sheet music for this album because many songs were taught by rote¹⁰³ by black staff members of Drakies, other South African traditional musicians or music experts, and South African musicologists.

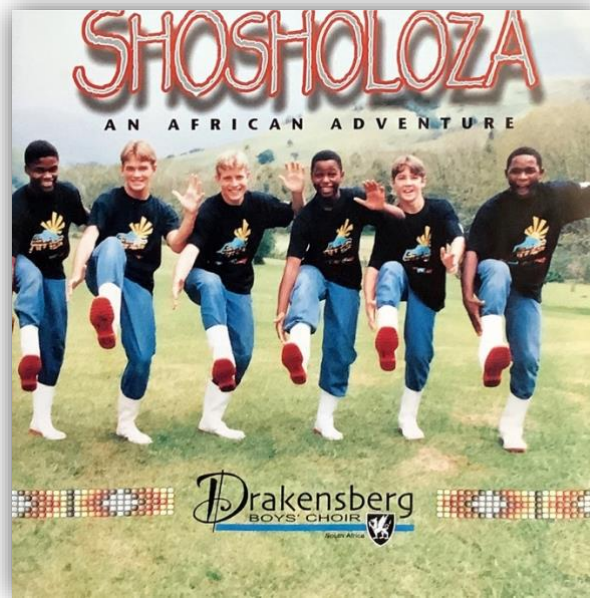


Figure 1: The *Shosholoza - An African Adventure* album cover

This album features thirty traditional African songs, most likely collected during the late 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s. As a boy attending the school in 1998, I remember singing many of the songs featured on this album until I graduated from Drakies in December 2002.

¹⁰³ *Shosholoza - An African Adventure*.

The album, which I own a physical copy of, offers the title and general translation of each song and a history of how Drakies began to sing traditional African music in a small leaflet included with the album. The historical information states that a "conscious decision¹⁰⁴" was made in 1983 to have more traditional African music in the program while aiming to keep these traditional songs as authentic as possible. During his interview, Vaughan van Zyl also addresses his aim to keep traditional African songs as authentic as possible (see Chapters 3 and 4). The leaflet¹⁰⁵ tells us in 1985, on tour in Europe (Vaughan says the trip was to Greece), Drakies presented a complete traditional African set, with no or little pauses between each song, intending to tell a story. The album description says that when Drakies performs these songs live or on television, audience members will see movements and choreography. Unfortunately, this is not the case when listening to audio versions. They did, however, include the gumboot dance as they felt the rhythms through claps, slapping, stomps, and other body percussions would be interesting enough to the listener.

I have listed five of these thirty songs on the album. It is important to note that there may be various arrangements of the same songs, as the original was taught by rote, which has allowed these songs to adapt and change since being sung by Drakies in the 1980s and 1990s. I attempted to find the best audio version and/or visual sheet music; however, because of the adaptations and changes of these songs over the years and because these songs are often passed down aurally from one generation to the next, the sheet music (if found) may not completely match the audio recording.

¹⁰⁴ *Shosholoza - An African Adventure.*

¹⁰⁵ *Shosholoza - An African Adventure.*

1. ***Shosholoz***¹⁰⁶ – a song originally from Zimbabwe but adopted by South Africa, is still one of Drakies' most popular songs performed locally and internationally.

Translation: "Good luck with your train journey out of South Africa."

Sheet Music and audio recording

- <https://www.jwpepper.com/Shosholoz/10383001.item#.ZGf1CC3MJQI>
- <https://open.spotify.com/track/38F1sUv1GT9qBnK7FowwC0?si=a5267592e06b48a4>

2. ***Bawo***¹⁰⁷ – A traditional Xhosa prayer – often adapted and changed to suit the choir or the occasion, as seen in Michael Barrett's arrangement below.

Translation: "Father, I am your child, although I have sinned. I weep before you. Please forgive me."

Sheet music and audio recording

- <https://www.jwpepper.com/Bawo/11195661.item>
- <https://open.spotify.com/track/56tr9eC9r10uMPYcAhRnkq?si=f04bd30d41314d89>

¹⁰⁶ *Shosholoz* - *An African Adventure*.

¹⁰⁷ *Shosholoz* - *An African Adventure*.

3. *Nstikana's Bell*¹⁰⁸ – A hymn the Xhosa prophet *Ntsikana* used to call the members of his church in a remote valley because he did not have a church bell.

Translation: See the above description

Sheet music and audio recording

- No sheet music found – taught and learned by rote
- <https://open.spotify.com/track/2JSY8HQrwuGnPoz3XXzUq?si=f9bc29f715f844>

[49](#)

4. *Yini Kangaka*¹⁰⁹ – A Xhosa folk song offering insight into the lives of mine worker families in South Africa. I have specifically included this song because it provides a historical context of the displacement of rural indigenous people seeking employment in the mines to feed their families.

Translation: "Why so long? Be quiet and listen. We took this child, gave him a protective charm, and sent him to the mines. When will he return with money because we are starving?"

¹⁰⁸ *Shosholoza - An African Adventure.*

¹⁰⁹ *Shosholoza - An African Adventure.*

Sheet music and audio recording

- No sheet music found – taught and learned by rote
- <https://open.spotify.com/track/6uSbYOI7SFglS4jg2TssHn?si=b893e6f7cc9e496f>

5. ***Tula Tula***¹¹⁰ – One of South Africa's most well-known lullabies (Zulu) – was arranged by Michael Barrett while attending DBCS as a chorister.

Translation: "Hush, little baby, your mother will still be here in the morning."

Sheet music and audio

- There is sheet music of this song available on the internet; however, I did not find a satisfactory score that I would recommend. This song is also often taught by rote.
- <https://open.spotify.com/track/0YaJoGsy9YW5fq6YexfBb0?si=c7f637d5c3d540d>

2

¹¹⁰ *Shosholoza - An African Adventure.*

Chapter 3: Three Restoryed Interviews

Before delving into the restoryed interviews, it would be beneficial to know more about each interviewee, their background, and their journey through a short biography to understand their story better.

Brief biographies of interviewees

Mzwandile Bala

Mzwandile, born in 1975 in the Eastern Cape (a province in southeast South Africa), was the first black boy accepted at Drakies. After Drakies, he attended St. Stithians College¹¹¹ in Johannesburg, where he made an impact by broadening the scope of musical activities at the college, creating, and directing vocal groups and bands of all genres. While attending St. Stithians College, he formed the group *TKZee*, which became a household name in 1997, with hit songs, one of them being *Shibobo*¹¹², playing on all major South African radio stations¹¹³. Mzwandile is also part of the Bala Brothers group which is signed to Sony BMG Entertainment Africa and consists of all three brothers, Mzwandile, Loyiso, and Phelo Bala. Mzwandile is part of a reality television show called “The Bala Family,” released on *M-Net*, a major television network in South Africa, in April of 2023. Today, Mzwandile is a fellow of the University of Johannesburg and is still working on major musical projects around the country¹¹⁴.

¹¹¹ A wealthy private school in Johannesburg, South Africa.

¹¹² A South African slang word that does not belong to any specific language of South Africa and means to kick a soccer ball between one’s opponent’s legs.

¹¹³ “TKZee - Shibobo (With Crowd) Final Countdown – YouTube,” Accessed November 21, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/>.

¹¹⁴ 702, “‘We Have Seen Our Dreams Happen, They Went beyond What We Expected’ - Zwai Bala,” Accessed November 21, 2023, <https://www.702.co.za/articles/470889/we-have-seen-our-dreams-happen-they-went-beyond-what-we-expected-zwai-bala>.

Niekie van der Walt

Niekie, a white South African born in 1980 in Brits, a small town northwest of Johannesburg, attended Drakies between 1994 and 1995. After Drakies, he completed his secondary school education at Hoërskool¹¹⁵ Brits¹¹⁶. Niekie then studied at the North-West University in Potchefstroom (a small university town) and the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein (one of the three capital cities of South Africa). While at the North-West University, Niekie formed an a capella group called “Flip a Coin,” which sang Afrikaans and English pop covers while also releasing original music of their own. The group made several appearances on national television and had their music played on select South African radio stations. Before the Covid pandemic, Niekie was the Director of Music for the North-West Youth Choir (based in Potchefstroom), who sang with many famous South African musicians. Today, Niekie writes music and film scores while working fulltime as a financial advisor in Potchefstroom¹¹⁷.

Vaughan van Zyl

Vaughan, a white South African born in Heidelberg (age and date of birth unknown at the writing of this biography), a small town south of Johannesburg, attended Drakies between 1982 and 1985. During his college years, around the age of eighteen or nineteen, Vaughan became an accomplished pianist, receiving his ‘Performance in Piano’ license from the Associate Board of the Royal Schools of Music. Vaughan then went on to play as a pianist for various famous Afrikaans musicians. In 1993, Vaughan joined Drakies again as an accompanist and in 1996 as a

¹¹⁵ Afrikaans for “Highschool.”

¹¹⁶ “Facebook,” Accessed November 22, 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/niekievdw/>.

¹¹⁷ “Niekie van Der Walt CFP® - Partner at PSG Wealth, Potchefstroom 19 Palmiet Street - PSG Wealth | LinkedIn,” Accessed November 22, 2023, <https://za.linkedin.com/in/niekie-van-der-walt-cfp>.

conductor and left for other ventures after 1998. Once again, in 2021, Vaughan returned to Drakies to be the Artistic Director, the position Christian Ashley-Botha held before retiring in 2006¹¹⁸.

MZWANDILE’S STORY: ‘Do I speak honestly, or do I speak diplomatically?’

It is the year 2000. The Drakensberg Boys’ Choir is singing at an event hosted by Rand Merchant Bank in Cape Town, an investment and financial powerhouse on the African continent¹¹⁹. The event is a sort of “Starlight Pops” concert where music celebrities are invited to perform. The event is on the Nederburg Wine Farm Estate on their vast lawn surrounded by ancient oak trees, with a backdrop of the Paarl Rock Mountain looking over us. The organization spares no expense, inviting some of the best of the talent South Africa has to offer. It feels surreal to be part of such a significant event, but my experience is that Drakies performs at such an event at least once a year. The event organizers cater to every physical need a forever-hungry, energetic boy could ask for – all-you-can-drink sodas, sugary treats for days, and pizza. However, all of this is forgotten soon, as we start to rehearse with the show's highlight – TKZee¹²⁰.

I am starstruck as I finally see Zwai (Mzwandile) for the first time. We are all on stage, with the choir being on choir bunkies towards the back behind the orchestra and Zwai and his team at the front on solo mics. Zwai is speaking into the mic, doing a sound check, while each boy eagerly

¹¹⁸ Between 2007 and 2020, Drakies was conducted by various choral conductors who took the post of Artistic Director. Vaughan keeps a low online profile, so there is little information about him to form a biography. The biography I wrote about Vaughan was constructed by gathering information from friends and acquaintances who also know Vaughan as a colleague or teacher.

¹¹⁹ On the Rand Merchant Bank website, the bank describes itself as, “We are a leading African corporate and Investment Bank and part of one of the largest financial services groups (by market capitalization) in Africa – FirstRand Limited.” <https://www.rmb.co.za>.

¹²⁰ Apple Music describes TKZee as, “one of the most iconic groups to ever come out of the ‘90s kwaito scene. Together, the trio of Kabelo Mabalane, Tokollo Tshabalala and Zwai Bala took influences from both hip-hop and classical on their sample-heavy 1994 debut EP.”

anticipates hearing him perform live. I have only heard stories of this legend and how he has overtaken the South African music scene. “But he came from Drakies,” I think – I want to be just like him.

They are now ready to begin. The beat drops, and our bodies and souls want to move to it immediately. TKZee starts singing one of their latest songs, ‘Shibobo.’ It is the song we have all been waiting for. The song is a remix of the 80s classic ‘The Final Countdown’ with a Kwaito/Hip Hop¹²¹ vibe of isiZulu, English, and Cape Town Afrikaans slang. This is what we (the boys) came for. This is what we came to listen to.

The following is a restorying of Mzwandile’s narrative collected through an interview with him. In summary, I asked Mzwandile for an account of his initial experience at Drakies and how the school played and still plays a role in nation-building.

I was admitted into Drakies after winning the “Golden Voice Competition” at a time when there was a lot of friction. There was no transformation pressure put on Drakies at that time. There was an issue with the system at Drakies and the country at large. They could choose to include or not include black boys as school members. I remember I had much anxiety thinking about the school and arriving for the first time, and also because everybody had started already. I could sense the friction when I got there. Some parents said they did not want a “kaffir¹²²” at their school showering with their boys. Some parents even threatened to take their boys out of the school, and Bunny¹²³ just said, “So be it.” Bunny did not take ‘no’ for an answer.

¹²¹ Masterclass.com describes ‘Kwaito’ as “upbeat dance music from South Africa that reflects life in its townships.”

¹²² The term ‘kaffir’ is hate speech in South Africa, and now illegal to use.

¹²³ Christian Ashley-Botha, an earlier and longtime standing conductor at the school.

You know, treating people differently is not a thing only black people experience. It is a human thing. It's a structure thing. A fellow contestant in the "Golden Voice Competition" the previous year had also joined the school the same year I did. His name is Nicholas Nicolaidis, you know him? The dwarf guy? I say that confidently because if you called him a midget, he would say, "I'm not a midget! I'm a dwarf!" Nicholas was excited to see me, and he was helping me by showing me around everywhere. He told me, "You know what, don't worry if they tease you or are horrible to you because you're black. I get the same thing because I'm small." And that was like a big lightbulb moment for me. It made me realize that people will just treat differently, because you're just different, you know? Nicholas's guidance and words really stuck out to me during the first few days.

I then asked Mzwandile if he could be more specific about the initial moments he experienced right at the beginning when he arrived at Drakies.

Maybe now, when I think back, it really was only a few months, but back then, it felt like a long time. But it was a matter of a few weeks after having showered with me as well and they see, oh, that myth that black boys are like, you know ... it's actually not really true. Like I remember when I hurt myself and blood came out, this other boy in my class was like, "Your blood is red!" So, I do remember those experiences. Otherwise, I was looking forward to the whole music experience. I felt like I was in heaven, and nothing else mattered.

I do remember Mr. Gouws, the housemaster at the time, came to pick me up from the Greyhound bus station in Escourt¹²⁴ because I came a day later than the other boys. And I came face to face with a guy who didn't say a single word to me, until we got to the school. And then on

¹²⁴ A small town close to The Drakensberg Boys Choir

opening night of “King Africa” the musical, just a couple of months later, he was there as a guest of honor ‘cheersing’¹²⁵ everyone with wine and accepting praise for having a black boy at Drakies. And on the program of King Africa, it said “Courtesy of the Drakensberg Boys’ Choir School.” Drakies was strategic in how they placed black boys while on tour, but I could tell exactly what was going on. So the perception was, you know, displaying or bragging about having a black boy at the school.

That same year my father passed away and when I came back in the second term, one of the old boys’ father had died, and there was a half-mast flag for this boy’s father, but not mine.

Drakies had a half-mast flag for an old boy’s¹²⁶ father who had died, but not for my father, who had also recently died, and I am currently an active member of the school. But I just thought, well, that is the way things are. Thank God, I was a lot more mature. In the ANC, they call it *Rhabula*¹²⁷, you know – I was struggle conscious.

And also, they didn't just take some Mickey Mouse or just some regular black boy, you know, because that very first year in fact, at the end of the first term I got my first professional stage production in Johannesburg. I was not just a regular black boy - I was a child star. It was full house¹²⁸ and it was the first time I’ve ever sang at an indoor arena. The Ashley-Botha choir came to see me perform at the Standard Bank Arena. And then, getting standing ovations every night with no less than five thousand people attending each performance, was an eye-opener for many people.

¹²⁵ A South African lingo meaning to toast or celebrate, usually with alcoholic drinks

¹²⁶ Alumni

¹²⁷ Xhosa word for “Take a sip”

¹²⁸ Fully attended

Through talking about his initial experience at Drakies, I asked Mzwandile if he thought Drakies changed (transformed) over time while he attended.

While speaking about political issues with the other white boys, I could tell that they were not aware of how serious the political climate was. The boys knew fuck all about what was really going on in the country at that time. And I even remember the day Mandela was released from prison, we were all watching it from the caravan park at the bottom, and the vibe was tense - I remember one Afrikaans boy said, as he came out of the television room, “O, hier kom kak nou my broer¹²⁹.” You know, like South Africa is about to see shit.

And you know, I know that narrative of like, “Jeez you're not like the other blacks, who steal.” And at the end of the show they (the white families who host the boys) are like, “Wil jy nie by ons kom bly nie?”¹³⁰ Said by all the tannies¹³¹ and I'm like laughing inside thinking, “Ja, right, I know how you function. At first I thought it was the Afrikaans guys that were more racist, but now I've learned so much about racism. And it's something that I've taken a keen interest on, just social sciences in general through which I've learned that it wasn't only the Afrikaans guys who were racist. Like one of the English guys says, “Ja, but not all of us are like that.” And I would feel like, “Ja but dude you're benefiting from everything that white people are getting, but at the end of the day, will you stand up for black people?” I knew what white privilege was even though I did not know the terms back then. You know, like, so when we have an argument and I tell them like in class, “Boet, (imagine I'm like the only black boy), ja you're fucking white!”

So white supremacy, white privilege, you know, the works - I never quite had the words for them, but I understood.

¹²⁹ Directly translated from Afrikaans as , “Oh, here comes shit now my brother.”

¹³⁰ Translated as, “Don't you want to come stay with us?”

¹³¹ Translated as “Aunties.”

I remember a particular time when I was having a political argument with some of my peers, and they were saying, “Ja, but the ANC are terrorists, you know.” And while arguing, one teacher at the back said, “But they are terrorists, Zwai.” After I left the school in 1995, hearing that Drakies was excited to be performing at the Rugby World Cup opening and for Mandela visiting the school, I thought, “Ja, I remember exactly when they said Mandela was a terrorist.”

Even if you go on tour, you know, when you arrive at a school and see them, trying to host kids around, like okay, so you go in with Mrs. so and so, and you have to take that nap in the afternoon, you know, and stay in the bus with Ndudeni¹³² or whatever. And then boys would bring me some sandwiches before the show, you know what I'm saying? Just like, cool, but I've got most of the solos in that show, you know, from like the first flippen¹³³ Mass by Haydn to whatever.

But I am proud of being the first black boy in the school, even though I almost left. When I spoke to my father on his deathbed about leaving the school, he told me not to leave because I had to pave the way for my brother, who would attend later. Little did I know that I was also paving the way for other black boys who would attend later too.

I proceed to ask Mzwandile about his experience with how Drakies was received on international tours.

We used to see pictures of the Pope from 1983 and so on. But when I was there, dude, obviously it would be the African music that would be very popular. And Bunny, what a smart man. What a man. Like really, Bunny would... he knew what was working. Wherever we went, we would sing the folk songs of that country and also the National Anthem of the country. Even the year before, I joined the choir, they had gone on a tour of Portugal. And so, some of that repertoire, they were

¹³² The school bus driver at the time who's ancestral land the school (Drakensberg Boys' Choir) was built on.

¹³³ A South African watered-down word for “F*ck.”

still doing the following year when I arrived. And it was folk songs, Portuguese folk songs. I mean, I flippen sang all the National Anthems, even the Taiwanese National Anthem. And the international audiences really loved that stuff. This reminds me we completed an incredibly successful reality show called The Bala Family Show on M-net¹³⁴, and one thing that people are saying that is most common is their relatability and how they relate to it.

I ask Mzwandile how Drakies has influenced his career.

I'm a person that didn't love to study, but I like to learn, especially for personal growth. And so, Bunny Ashley Botha was a well of knowledge for me, not just in musical terms, but he applied methods and systems in order to get a particular result. And I was intrigued by the systems that he applied, you know, in achieving. I've seen it work or rather I've applied it even when I was at St. Stithians College, which was completely a Rugby School until I got there. And I got rugby players not only to sing in tune but to sing in harmony. My being there saw the start of jazz bands and little groups, and culture being such a strong thing at the school because I was flippen playing the organ in the chapel, taking choir, starting all sorts of groups. These people, these places, these institutions weren't really represented in music as much as they are now until I got there.

I've produced and worked on records that are records, that have never been broken in the history of South African music and what would be called a rap as a performance. I would even produce the actual vocals, whereas now a producer... A hip hop producer would be like, "The guy that makes the beats." But I would apply all that I learned from Bunny in even directing to get the best out of what you can out of the person that's behind the microphone.

¹³⁴ A South African Television Cable Company which produces reality tv shows.

But people will say, you know, “That's why you're so talented, because you went to Drakies.” No, it's not because of Drakies, it's a combination of all those things. Drakies had just added so much to what I had already, you know, and it was just a really divine process, you know, to what I have today. And it's just done so much for what I know and how I think. So it goes back to how you think as well and how you view things. You may not be a Bunny, but you can learn from anybody and see how things function and how humans function. So ja, all in all, it's helped me immensely in my professional career.

I asked Mzwandile if he thinks Drakies still play a role in nation-building.

Drakies is away from everything. When you look at Drakies, they are the most rainbow-ish, but they are that way by fluke or by chance. The school is still very white from a management or board of directors' standpoint, but they still rely on black support and black funding. They need to look right, especially overseas - I mean, it's the African music that is bringing in the clients - not your Mozart's and everything else. So if you're in business like Drakies is, you know what you need to do, to get funding. I witnessed the change take place at Drakies, and so to say that it was intentional is not accurate. Drakies may claim they transformed, but they are strategic about it.

The Afrikaners are still holding onto this little thing of theirs and are not under pressure to transform. So ja, it's a shame, but I'm a solutions guy. I have learned a lot. I've learned how white audiences react; I've worked a lot in those spaces because of my experiences and knowing my audiences and just the consumer behavior in general.

I asked Mzwandile for any final thoughts he has on our discussion.

Overall, in terms of my experience, it's been, it was absolutely amazing and eye-opening. And for the boys, too, the many of those that never turned out to be professional musicians. Still, the school contributed a lot to their character and what they do with their lives in general. For me, there were definitely more positives than negatives in terms of my personal growth. And when I look at the demographics now of the choir, it's amazing, you know?

No one there necessarily was conscious and intentional about transformation and nation-building. So yeah, there is still some ground to be covered to really realize ... to be an active force of nation-building. So, I think it was a pleasant surprise that something can be so beautiful which was not in the founder's vision. And I think it is a good thing. It's a good thing for everybody. It's a good thing for everybody to experience and be part of. I mean, what I have gotten and achieved or was blessed with in terms of experience was not all my own thinking and intention. So, it goes for everyone, including myself.

But it is beautiful when it dawns on me. We all had an awakening moment at some point. I'd like to believe that the school as well had that. And so, it brought about just, "Wow, how great is this?" I mean, dude, when you watch those kids now... first half is all singing choir stuff, but the whole second half is African music. And now it's like, choreographed.

Everything is just like, "Wow." And if I say, "Wow." I mean, "Wow." And it's a beautiful thing, because maybe how I'd look at it is more of a discovery on ourselves, like, "Wow, we actually look good." And I bless that. I really have no qualms, and I'd just like to be real before we take any cred or props for anything. Apartheid was... It messed us up. All of us ... all of us. All of us are victims of apartheid.

And as long as we are all waking up together, and the enemy is disunity amongst ourselves, and hopefully, at one point, it will not be on the color of the skin but on differing ideas and what it is that we all want for all South Africans.

NIEKIE'S STORY: 'So, Niekie, are you becoming colorblind?'

It is 7:30 pm on Friday evening in 2009, and I am sitting in the North-West University Sanlam Auditorium. It is cold and dry outside, but the heat inside is outrageous as we wait for the 'Ser' finals to begin. The 'Ser' is an a capella vocal competition between sororities and fraternities¹³⁵ held every Winter (May-June). The competition seems fiercer every year as groups hire the best directors (music and choreography directors) to be the best to get to the finals. The singing is out of this world and something you have never experienced. There is so much electricity in the air it is extremely difficult to contain oneself. It is almost bigger than rugby. Almost.

But there is an opening act, and who better to open this event than the a capella group, 'Flip-A-Coin.' Niekie heads and is a part of this group. He started the group, and from early on, they were a hit! They begin their first a capella chord, and it is absolutely flawless. The girls go crazy, drowning out the rest of their performance for a few seconds. Their screams alone tell you that 'Flip-A-Coin' is a vocal force to reckon with. It's absolutely chaos inside, but then the bass vocalists starts a little 'Dm' which suddenly silences the hype, as people sit on the edge of their seats to listen to the rest that follows. Every part now has their own rhythmic beat or pitch on 'Oo,' creating a myriad of sound and vocal texture.

It is insane to me how they're able to uphold and maintain such perfection. Still, afterward, I get to know Niekie and realize that he is the embodiment of perfection in vocal performance and

¹³⁵ In South Africa they are termed ladies' and mens' hostels

music making. I hear that 'Flip-A-Coin' undergoes intense training and practice during rehearsals, with Niekie keeping the young vocalists on their feet with expectations of excellence. Similarly, like he was taught at Drakies, there is no room for anything else.

The following is a restorying of Niekie's narrative collected through an interview with him. In summary, I asked Niekie if he agrees to Drakies being called the 'Rainbow Voices,' to talk about his experience meeting Nelson Mandela, how the choir was treated on tours as a racially inclusive choir, and whether he believes Drakies had a role in nation-building.

I remember the first day I arrived at Drakies. I remember thinking, "Okay, there's quite a lot of black and non-white people in the school." And from coming up north in the country in South Africa, this was unusual. So, I left a school that was predominantly white¹³⁶. Well, I can't remember any blacks being in that school. And if I refer to blacks, it's not only black people, but also indian and coloured¹³⁷ or brown people in South Africa. So, when I arrived, I saw a few non-whites in the school, and being in a school that's only one hundred boys strong. I might be corrected, but I think there was about possibly between, close to 30 blacks in the school, and it was quite a lot for that time. Just let me say, in South African terms, we know that the black culture has got a rich history of singing and especially the Zulu tribe, which is from that region where the Drakensberg Boys Choir School is situated. They've got very rich voices. And I know... it didn't bother me much, but it did ...what do you call it in English?

I offer the word "struck" or "strike"

Yes, it struck me that there were blacks in the school, but it didn't bother me at all. So, I remember one elderly person in my family telling me, "So, Niekie, are you becoming

¹³⁶ He left another elementary school to attend Drakies

¹³⁷ The term "Coloured" is not offensive in South Africa and is used widely.

colourblind?” And, I thought, I don't know what he means. But only when I got older did I remember this guy asking me that. And I now know what he referred to, “Are you becoming colourblind now?” And at that stage, I think his age was possibly between 60 and 70, so he was from the apartheid era and brainwashed to that extent, so that he thinks that there's only one colour.

So yes, I do agree with Desmond Tutu¹³⁸ because, prior to the end of apartheid, it [Drakies] was already transformed to a colourblind school where nobody sees color. So, it was definitely a rainbow school. I mean, we slept in the same rooms, we shared the same bathrooms, which was unusual for South Africa at that stage.

After hearing his answer about his initial experiences arriving at Drakies, I asked him if he would tell me about his experience singing for and meeting Nelson Mandela

Well, as a small boy, there's two memories of that day. The first one is the helicopters. These military helicopters with open doors flying up the mountain. That was a great experience. So yes, that's the first thing I remember. But the second one is being on that mountain with two other choirs. So, it was not only us, it was the Kanaries¹³⁹ from a specific division in the military. And the second choir was a black choir. And all these African-themed clothes they wore on the mountain, it struck me.

And so, we were walking on the mountain, and it was quite windy, after touching down there with the choppers and going to the specific place where we had to stand where all the flags were hanging. We were right at the edge of a cliff. Well, not right at the edge, but, say, a few meters from the edge of the cliff. And all these choppers just flying behind us with the new South African

¹³⁸ He is referring to the statement in my literature review which says that Drakies is called the ‘Rainbow Voices,’ in reference to Desmond Tutu’s name for South Africa – ‘The Rainbow Nation.’

¹³⁹ See Vaughan’s interview for more info on the Kanaries

flag. There was a brand new South African flag at that stage and, ja, I'm getting chills just mentioning it.

And Nelson Mandela, he sat on a small built stage with these red carpets. Red carpets and just a small built stage. And we must remember that he was also... he was not a young person at that stage. Although, he was very strong mentally. He came down after or before we sang the new Shosholoza ... yes, it was Shosholoza. He came down, and he started to dance with us. We were doing the Shosholoza dance. I've still got a picture of the front page of our main newspaper in South Africa, called the Beeld, at that stage. And on the front page, there was a photo of Nelson Mandela dancing and doing the Shosholoza dance with us. And I was standing right in front of him in the front row, dancing this Shosholoza dance. And how proud am I? Well, it was ... how long ago was it? It was 30 years ago. Almost 30 years back but I can still refer to that picture and say I was part of this whole new movement. Part of history. And You don't know what's actually happening at that stage, at that age.

So, after that song, we had the privilege of standing in the queue to greet him by hand. And I remember, specifically remember this one thing, when I put my hands in his hand, I thought, 'Jeez, this is a huge hand.' And that's my remembering of that day. What a great, great day, and then obviously there was the excitement to go down in the choppers again. And I don't think we sang the new National Anthem then because only a few months later, we had to learn the new national anthem for the Rugby World Cup, where we sang at the opening.

I then asked him about his experience going on tours during the tense political climate of '94 and '95 and if he remembered how the choir was treated.

Oh, that's a difficult question. Reason being that if we revert back to the first question ... when I arrived there¹⁴⁰, it was still apartheid, and we knew that the elections were coming up. And it was mainstream news at that stage. However, the repertoire of the school prior the new elections in '94 was already half Western, half African. So, The first half of our repertoire was always classical music, mainly, which we know is more Western music, and then we would go for a break and put on our African attire. And then there would be the African half, which would not be conducted. The second half was always African music. It was just African music, with the African attire and African moves and dance, etc. So that did not change.

It was one of the X factors of the Drakies before the new elections, that they adopted this repertoire. And I can't recall that they changed the repertoire in any way after the elections. Not at all. I think to this day, that is still one of the X factors of the Drakies, that they do have a second half just for African music. So, whoever brought that in before my time at Drakies, was spot on. So, I don't think that was politically motivated in any way, to do that, because I don't think the school was involved in politics at all, although they were colourblind with their repertoire, and with the children taken¹⁴¹ into the school.

But, I think the main challenge of the school was funding for black kids. I think that was the main challenge they had. So, we knew that we were more privileged than black people in South Africa at that stage. And the blacks being in the school, we knew that "Okay, this person or this guy has perhaps got a sponsor." And so that's the first thought you have, "Okay, he's got a sponsor." The second thought is, "Okay, so his father or mother is now in politics, earning money." So ja,

¹⁴⁰ At Drakies

¹⁴¹ Admitted

that was just our thought. But as I said, colourblind, no change in repertoire before or after. And I can't recall any clients or people who we sang for, who handled me differently, no.

I then asked him how the international community received Drakies when they toured overseas.

So, in 1995, we went to Europe and we were privileged to meet some of the Royal family and do a private concert for them. We also sang in a lot of cathedrals, like in St. Paul's Cathedral, and went to France, Belgium, etc. So, it was mainly Europe, where I was involved with the choir.

So, again, reverting to the previous question, in terms of the repertoire, I think the reception of the international community was mainly based on the repertoire we sang, and not specifically on, "Oh, look, there's a white and a black boy standing next to each other and singing in the same choir." I don't think that was the main thing the audience thought about at that stage. They were mainly in awe of the ability of these young boys singing music they knew because we know Europe is about classical music. So, they were the first half, could be perhaps the people in the audience said, "I know this piece by Mozart or Bach or Beethoven". "Oh, their interpretation of it is beautiful." So that's the first part.

But then the second half came - the African music - where the international community just went crazy. And I do not think the standing ovations for the second half were in any way politically motivated or saying, "All right, look, what this choir is bringing in now and singing for us, the African music because they have now transformed". I think the standing ovations were purely from a standpoint of, "This is great, look at this. This is great art". So yes, the international community were mostly in awe of the music. Although they were very knowledgeable of the situation in South Africa.

I also want to add something, which was very funny. In the international community, we did have some young people in Europe, specifically, ask us, “So why are you white and coming from South Africa?” So, we thought at that stage, that's quite a dumb question to ask. “Do you not know of the whole apartheid thing? It's all over the news. Nelson Mandela being released and being elected last year. He's our new president”. So, from the international community, it was more of, “You've got these artists that are singing and are only 10 or 11 years old.” So, I do not think that all the people in the Western world were knowledgeable of our situation in South Africa. So, it didn't change their perception of listening to our repertoire at all.

I then told him we were about to conclude the interview and asked if he had any final thoughts. The answer to follow, in my opinion, sheds light on a historical event that people across the globe consider a significant contribution to helping strengthen the fragile new democracy of South Africa and assisting in nation-building, in which Drakies played a significant role.

Referring to the question you asked before, from a chorister point of view, I definitely think that we were part of nation-building, but not as much as the leadership of the school or as the choral directors of the school, because, obviously, we did not have any proper knowledge of what was happening behind the scenes. Maybe there were clients requesting specific songs that should be dropped from their repertoire, or vice versa, that should be put into the repertoire because the whole structure of the Drakensberg Boys Choir School is that you've got the body corporate or the parents' organization, which is made out of parents of choristers in the school. They basically run the school and arrange for funding, etc., and they employ the staff of the school. So maybe there was some pressure from the parents' organization towards the staff of the school, which might have influenced a change in repertoire or how we go about doing marketing.

So, I don't think anyone in the school besides the leadership in grade nine were involved in that kind of structural change toward nation-building. However, the most important single event where the first camaraderie or nation-building occurred was the 1995 Rugby World Cup, held in South Africa. And why I mention that is because we had the task of opening that World Cup. I was privileged in that the government flew us down from KwaZulu-Natal¹⁴² to Cape Town. And we opened that World Cup with our national anthem, which at that point, was basically a few weeks old. Nobody knew the new national anthem, the “Nkosi Sikeleli”. We only knew the “Uit die blou van onse hemel.”¹⁴³

And we knew that we were going to get a new national anthem. And they send us drafts, they send us drafts, “Okay, this is the new one”. And then after that, “No, this is the new one”. And after that, “No, this is the new one. So, stick with this. You going to sing this”. And we had a very strict way of learning our part of the song in the Drakensberg Boys Choir School, as you know... Well aware of. So, we got the sheet music of this new national anthem. It's a strange language. I didn't know what it means. I know “Uit die blou van onse hemel”, which is our previous national anthem.

So, firstly, I know the language. It's Zulu. I know the language, but I don't the meaning of any of the lyrics. And then the second part comes where there's a small part of our old national anthem, which I knew, “Uit die blou van onse hemel”. And then on that same melody, there was just a change in lyrics going to English, “Sounds the call to come together.” But it's on the old National Anthem's melody. I'm mentioning this because you are confronted with this new change, which was actually the very first ... what do you call it ... the very first time that, as a small boy, you now know everything is about to change.

¹⁴² Also known as ‘The Kingdom of the Zulus,’ that is ruled by a King and other royal ministers. The Zulu kingdom is a political entity in its own right, within the borders and government of South Africa.

¹⁴³ The National Anthem sung during apartheid, and translated from Afrikaans as, “From the blue of our Heaven.”

We have to remember Mandela was released from prison earlier than 1994. So, it wasn't new, that he's a free man. And it wasn't new that we knew that he was held in prison for the wrong reasons. So, at that stage, it was an old story. Because, if I'm correct, I think he was released 1990 or 1991. However, I was a boy when I was confronted with this new change, which was this new National Anthem that nobody else in the country yet knew.

So, we got the sheet music, and we had this process of, "Learn your parts" and then you go to the voice leader of your vocal parts, say soprano one or soprano two. At that stage, I was a soprano one and you had three attempts to sing it to this voice leader, and he would listen to you pass you¹⁴⁴. So, once he passes you, you've got his signature, you can take it to the Maestro or the choral conductor and say, "Listen, I passed my part". And he, the choral conductor, then knew you know your part off by heart¹⁴⁵.

And I remember going to one of the Rugby fields with the sheet music and thinking, "How do I pronounce this? What's this 'Morena boloka'?" I didn't know what it was. So, what then happened is I had to go to one of my black friends and asked, "Listen, I know this is your language; you must help me now, and I'll help you with 'Uit die blou van onse hemel'." The problem is, he already knew "Uit die blou van onse hemel," so, he didn't need my help; I only needed his help. So, then you're confronted the whole time with, "Okay, so now that things are beginning to change, we have to work together." And it's a very small point on which we have to work together. But now, for the first time in my life, I needed something from him. And just maybe he would help me interpret these lyrics. So, this was definitely a part of nation-building in the sense that I was already colourblind at that stage. But, I didn't think that I was going to need anything from them in the future. But I definitely did.

¹⁴⁴ Pass you, meaning decide whether you know the song through listening to you.

¹⁴⁵ By memory

So, then we were flown down to Cape Town to do our dress rehearsal, as we go on the Rugby field, and we just saw this massive stadium with empty seats where we were going to sing the new national anthem. And obviously, we now knew that off by heart. And we also knew that nobody in the country knew this new National Anthem. It was being sent around, but don't make the mistake; the rugby fans traditionally in South Africa are whites, not blacks. So, we knew the stands were mostly going to be filled by white people, and they were not going to know this new national anthem.

And then we started singing this national anthem and I remember the Rugby players standing right behind us, or in the middle of us, because we were standing in a 'V' in this big open place. I think they were standing behind us. And we started singing this new national anthem, and we started "Nkosi sikeleli!" and nobody in the crowd was singing with us as if like, "Okay?" And we were used to that. Remember, we were actually performing artists; so the audience would never sing usually with us when we sang. So, we started singing; which was nothing strange to us. We started singing, and the people were silent because they knew they had to respect the new National Anthem, and our new flag was everywhere. And after the first part of the new national anthem, we got to the part where we started singing "Uit die blou van onse hemel." And now remember the whole audience or all the people in the stadium, they knew "Uit die blou van onse hemel", so, the moment we started singing that part, I remember thinking, I cannot hear my fellow chorister,

We were always attuned to the guy next to us. Yes, you had to be tuned to your fellow chorister next to you to listen. So, that was a whole thing of being choristers at Drakies, "Listen to your fellow choristers and adapt to that." So, I remember when we started singing "Uit die blou van onse hemel," I couldn't even hear my fellow chorister. "Where are you?". And the conductor is going crazy there, and the whole crowd is dragging in terms of tempo. So, everything was just

wrong because we were swallowed by this whole loud sound of the audience or the people in the stadium singing the old national anthem. And we knew that it was not that they wanted to be rude or disrespectful towards the new National Anthem; it was just that they didn't know it. They didn't know that last part in English and they didn't know the first part of the black languages. Then we got to the English part again, and the whole sound just quieted down, and we could finish the song.

And as Francois Pienaar at that stage said, “Nelson Mandela phoned and said, ‘Please just win this cup for us, for the nation, for the nation building. This will be the real first step towards the nation-building process.’” And yes, we miraculously won that final, and I remember the pictures of Nelson Mandela holding this Webb Ellis Cup and bowing his head. And for the first time, you will see people in the street, blacks, whites, together, wearing the same clothes, waving the same flag. So, I don't think we influenced nation-building, but we were definitely part of experiencing a very dramatic process of nation-building if that answers your question.

VAUGHAN’S STORY: ‘It's a memory that is so fresh in my mind as if it happened yesterday.’

We are front of house. It is December 1998 and summer in Plettenberg Bay, South Africa. Some windows are open, so you can feel and smell the fresh ocean breeze. The main doors have closed, and the concert is due to begin. Vaughan is about to conduct the program's opening piece for the first half of the concert, ‘A Fanfare for Christmas.’ composed by Robin Wells. The audience has taken their seats; the front of house is eerily quiet. Picture 90 boys standing in three choir lines without a sound. The absence of sound is so tangible you can cut it with a knife. Vaughan signals

to 'Spoon'¹⁴⁶ to hum an 'A' so we can get our starting note. 'Spoon' has perfect pitch – we know this because we tested it. Vaughan knows that 'Spoon' enjoys being asked to give the starting note because it makes him feel important. This is one of Vaughan's great attributes; making others feel good about themselves through celebrating their strengths. 'Spoon' takes a second to give the note, which to us boys, in this quiet atmosphere, and with so much energy to expel, feels like a time forever.

The 'A' is given. Vaughan offers an energetic breath in his upbeat, and then in four parts we all break out with an impressive 'Hodie' in open fifths. You can almost feel the unprepared audience jump as the sound hits them like a bullet train. Each note we sing is perfect and on pitch. There is no room for error. We have been told this and we have rehearsed this way. This piece will set the tone for the rest of the evening, so we have a responsibility to make a success of it. But, as usual, we are killing it. Vaughan's wide eyes, raised eyebrows and on point gesture tells us we are. And then we reach the descending cadence creating the climax on 'Haleluja!' The echo of this arrival point seems to last a long time, as it pierces every audience member's heart, even our own.

The following is a restorying of Vaughan's narrative collected through an interview with him. In summary, I asked Vaughan to tell me about his experience meeting Nelson Mandela, his opinion on Drakies being a living manifestation of the 'Rainbow Nation,' and the traditional African music sung for concerts.

Okay, it's a memory that is so fresh in my mind, as if it happened yesterday. So Nelson Mandela became the first democratically elected president in 1994, as we all know. Also, 1995 was a great year because South Africa hosted and won the Rugby World Cup, and we sang for the president

¹⁴⁶ 'Spoon' was his nickname at the school because he was born in his mother's kitchen. Unfortunately, I could not track him down, and no one I asked could remember his real name.

on top of the mountain¹⁴⁷ in celebration of the South African National Defense Force's 75th year anniversary. And the honored guest was our president¹⁴⁸.

And singing on top of that mountain was a task that has never been attempted, as far as I know, in South Africa. The Air Force hosted the whole event, and three choirs were involved: the Drakensberg Boys' Choir, the South African Defense Force Concert Group, known as the Kanaries¹⁴⁹, and the *Imiljonji KaNtu* Choral Society Choir from Soweto¹⁵⁰. And so, we were approached, and they¹⁵¹ said, let's do this event on top of the mountain. So, everybody was flown up with these air force helicopters. We had a rehearsal the day before we all flew up. And they even flew a piano up, and a piano tuner had to go up twice for this piano¹⁵².

We were at the top of the mountain. And then the big event came on that day, when, when President Nelson Mandela was flown up, and he was the last person to arrive on top of the mountain. Just him getting out of the helicopter, we felt a huge presence like you know he had. It was a memorable experience for all the boys, all the staff, and the choristers from the other choirs. But right atop the windy mountain, Nelson. Mandela sat on a podium with some of the chiefs and generals in the Defence Force¹⁵³ and some of the cabinet ministers as well. And I remember very well at the end of the concert, we sang *Shosholozza*, which I always refer to as South Africa's second national anthem, and he actually made his way down from the podium, walking down over that rough terrain, which is at the top of the mountain, down to where the choir was to come and stand

¹⁴⁷ The mountain is specifically called Champaign Castle

¹⁴⁸ Nelson Mandela

¹⁴⁹ Translated to Canary Bird

¹⁵⁰ An urban town on the outskirts of Johannesburg, and also the home of Nelson Mandela before he was arrested in 1962.

¹⁵¹ The South African National Defense Force.

¹⁵² The weather on top of Champaign Castle is unpredictable and can fluctuate rapidly.

¹⁵³ South African Defense Force

there with us. And standing facing all these different choirs, he joined in dancing with us, which was an absolute highlight, a one-in-a-lifetime experience.

Do you agree with the statement that the Drakensberg Boys' Choir became a symbol of hope for the South African nation towards the end of apartheid and is still considered so today?

I do believe that the Drakensberg Boys' Choir would have opened its doors to boys of all races even earlier, if possible. The first boy of color actually joined the Drakensberg Boys' Choir in 1986, which was the year after I left in grade nine. So, I do believe that it could have happened earlier if it weren't for those times¹⁵⁴. But having said that, the time it did happen was before the apartheid laws were abolished.

I asked Vaughan how the choir was received on tour, with an uninterrupted set of traditional African music and the school's acceptance of black boys. Through answering this question, Vaughan offers the history of the choir singing traditional African music, the present state of the choir's traditional African program¹⁵⁵, and future projects for the traditional African program. I divided his answer into four headings – history, present, future, and conclusion¹⁵⁶.

History

So, what we've got traditionally, which has been a tradition for over 33 years is our second half, which is our traditional African music program; which includes music from traditional parts of South Africa. We've even had music from neighboring countries because we're all part of Africa.

¹⁵⁴ Referring to the apartheid laws of segregation and black children not being allowed in 'white' schools.

¹⁵⁵ Program is used synonymously with the word setlist in this interview.

¹⁵⁶ Vaughan talks about the African traditional setlist they sang and now sing during various times of the interview. Some of the points he mentioned served well as a conclusion to the evolving traditional African program at Drakies.

And the very first African set was done in my grade nine year, in 1985. That's what I mean by the school was already geared for change and wanted to change, because the fact that we then, even with that political climate a white choir - we still sang African music. And I think that the world was ready for something fresh and something new like this, which Drakies was and that's¹⁵⁷ something which evolved over the years.

Then, when I came back as a student choir master¹⁵⁸ in 1990, we were scheduled to tour Greece the following year. In preparation for the tour, we decided to get that program out again. So we said, "Let's have a look at it ... let's do it because the world is ready for it." Our country was ready for it and would love it, and the world would love it. And then we got it out. And since then, African music has always been a part of our set¹⁵⁹. Having said that, even in the earlier years, Drakies did do traditional African music but more as separate pieces on the repertoire¹⁶⁰. For instance, there's one old record vinyl record, but I don't know exactly what year it was, but it was definitely in the 70s, called Bayeza¹⁶¹, a traditional Xhosa piece. So the schools always been wanting to do music of all cultures in South Africa. It wasn't just Afrikaans or English, but all the different cultures. So, the African music came in and became a tradition. And the tradition included the passing down of African music, because the school has a tradition of boys passing the music down to the younger boys. So, the older boys, for example, this year (the grade nines who are going to leave at the end of the year), they've done a lot of work in passing down their knowledge.

Look, because I've been involved with the school for 41 years, I saw what happened. The Director of Music and conductor Christian Ashley-Botha for nearly 27 years, built a lot of things

¹⁵⁷ Referring to the African music program.

¹⁵⁸ Drakies accepts student conductors to learn from and shadow the working conductors at the school.

¹⁵⁹ Concert program

¹⁶⁰ In reference to Drakies singing an uninterrupted set of music.

¹⁶¹ A Xhosa word for "We are coming."

up here, including the African music program. He had a vision. You know, he was sort of ahead of his time in all genres of music, not just African music. He was just on it and that good at seeing a way forward. So in the 90s, then, you know, as it went on like that, they added a gumboot dance sequence and drumming started playing a bigger role. Dancing became more refined and more together, and different African instruments like the kalimbas, panpipes, shakers - different shakers - grass shakers, calabash shakers, and all of that. And the world just absolutely loved this.

Present

And if you take African music now, in our auditorium or on tour year, the South African audiences love it because it is ours. It doesn't belong only to the Drakie boys, but belongs to us as a country. If we do any traditional music from any other country, we know it belongs to that country, so we try to do it as respectfully as we can. And not to make it ours, but too share this music. At the end of the day, I think that music belongs to all of us in the whole world. And that's something we can share. It's the international language. So, the African music here has evolved over the years. And when I came back now¹⁶², I could see, wow, it's just on another level. But it takes time; it takes time. So, we've had up to the beginning of this year¹⁶³ two sets. We've got African music set A and African music set B which is both a very traditional music program.

So we alternate between the two set lists. And a lot of the traditional music we sing, like you know very well, is not really notated, because the music has been passed on from generation to generation. And that's one of the reasons I love it so much. But our African music programs is very traditional. So, the only accompaniments are by means of African percussion. And solos are

¹⁶² Vaughan was invited to be the Director of Music at Drakies in 2020, after not being on staff at the school since 1998.

¹⁶³ 2023

important because in our traditional music, you have the *voorsanger*¹⁶⁴, and that person will start off singing for example, “We majola,” followed by a response from the choir with “We majola.” That's because it is traditional to do that.

Future

So, we have two traditional sets, but then we thought, let's go a little bit further this year. And now we've got our African music set C, which is done in two ways. We can do it with a full band, which we've done in the Joburg theatre, and in our auditorium. Or we do it with a track which has been made by our music producer Tristan Trent. And 96% of those instruments were recorded live, so it's not tracked with a MIDI and keyboard or whatever. So, you'll hear live bass, live keys, all of the guitars are live, and so on. The program is a more modern African program, and we have included hits in the program we call Afro-pop. So, Afro-pop is Johnny Clegg, Miriam Makeba Mango Groove, even *Daar Kom Die Alibama*¹⁶⁵, which is from the Cape, Circle of Life from The Lion King, just to mention a few. And there's a whole different vibe to it. So, the boys don't wear traditional African music clothes, but more like what we call the township vibes of the 50s and 60s, you know, the pennywhistle era, or the top hats and the dancing, and it's been choreographed like that as well. And we literally have audiences up on their feet. Every audience has been going wild, singing and dancing in the aisles for just about the whole second half¹⁶⁶, because it's all music that people know. And we've brought it out. It's our newest album, called *Stimela*¹⁶⁷. So that whole set is an album. And it's great listening.

¹⁶⁴ Afrikaans word for “leadsinger.”

¹⁶⁵ Music from Cape Town

¹⁶⁶ A full program in a Drakie concert usually consists of two halves, where an African music program is done in the second.

¹⁶⁷ A Zulu word meaning “Train” or “Locomotive.”

But then, obviously, it's also a visual experience because we can use stage lights. And then we've also got back footage, which we've used in the Joburg Theatre because of their massive big screens, and in Mauritius as well when we toured there - film footage from trains of the earlier years and mine workers, depending on the song, and what the song is about. So, it's a feel good, great show. And the main thing about it is to say "This is us" to South Africa. This is South Africa. And the wonderful thing about the program is that we will continue that next year.

But you can say, "Okay, let's park¹⁶⁸ these two songs, and let's bring two other ones in." Or, "Let's put these three on the side a little bit, and let's bring the other ones in." And we can tailor make it to make the show sound great. So, we can do it with a full live band, which consists of drum kit, other percussion, double bass, saxophones, piano, two keyboards and guitar. Some of these instruments are played by the boys in our concerts, and all the other players are the staff, which is also great. So far, we are all staff and boys on stage, and nobody conducts. So, we the staff, are part of the band and part of the show and having this great time, just like the boys the boys are having.

But then we can reduce it down to just piano accompaniment, a guitar, and some percussion, or just piano accompaniment and a drum. So we can basically do anything with the program. So, if there is an event or concert that we get booked for, and it's only a 20 minute thing, we can do it with twelve boys and still cover what we need to for the Afro-pop. And it's just a feel good thing. And it's exactly what our nation's about, and what our country's about. If you listen to the end, you also partake in this music. So my point is, it started many, many years ago and evolved into what we do here now.

¹⁶⁸ South African lingo for "Take out," and in this case "Take out of the program."

But, there are certain things you don't tamper with in traditional music. That said, we have people even doing stuff with a bit more of a pop vibe for example Mozart or back in the day that Vivaldi Gloria with an electric guitar. It is all okay, and there's nothing wrong with it. Some will not listen to that which is absolutely 100% okay. Whatever we do, and this goes for traditional music as well, as long as we don't tamper with it in a way that doesn't do justice to it. But for a lot of traditional music, we don't know who composed it; there's no names written on the top right¹⁶⁹, because you know, there are maybe no written notes. But, even if we don't have a composers name, we still need to respect that traditional music.

Conclusion

And again, that's one of the nice things about traditional music. That's the whole idea as well - there's no real scores for it. I must say, we have not done African music setlist A much this year, but with African music setlist B, the current boys will pass that whole program over to the new generation coming in next year - the new boys. That's exactly what we do with the African music program. It gets passed on and with so much respect, every year. But every year, we try to do it even better and better.

But then also through the African music program we try to have that traditional sound, as heard when it is passed on through these lovely valleys, homesteads and suburbs, or wherever this music is made. So if you do something in a specific culture, we will try our very best to make it sound authentic – with the actual music and the actual singing. But Afro-pop is a different thing.

Again, with Afro-pop, Mango Groove must sound like Mango Groove. We obviously give it a bit of our taste because we are a boys' choir. That's why with some of the tracks, we had brass

¹⁶⁹ Referring to a standard sheet of music with a composers name written on it.

(the brass was done up in Joburg by a brilliant brass player). He could give the feel of that exact original sound. And that's what's important - not to lose that effect and to have that feel. And it's not just a cover version. We made it our Drakensberg Boys' contribution to South Africa – this Afro-pop program. But, you can hear we have those big names we've been talking about, you know, the legends.

So there was a lot of groundwork, a lot of pioneers who worked which include conductors, staff, and many old boys from the past. That's where it started. So it really started in 1967 when the school opened its doors to the first twenty boys. So, it's not really anybody specific who can take all the credit for it. There's been a lot of groundwork done before my time, and we can just take it from here and move forward and keep on with that groundwork for whatever is going to come in ten years or 20 years' time from now.

I then asked Vaughan if he had any final thoughts about our discussion that he would like to share.

Thank you, Marshall. And it's great really great for me to speak about this, and I'm passionate about all of this because, like you, we, as all boys, are passionate about the school. But you don't necessarily have to be an old boy to be passionate about the school. You can be an old staff member, a parent, an old patron or an audience member. Everybody became passionate about the school.

But the big thing here is this; for me personally, in the role I'm in, and the position I'm in - I'm not doing this for us to be called the best boys choir in the world. My biggest aim is to, obviously, number one, educate our current boys. And like in our mission statement one of the very two important things in our mission statement, is to prepare boys for life. And, towards the end of this statement it says, "In a Christian environment." So those are, for me, our core values. And, for us

to live by that is our primary work. Then comes the training of the choir, the singing, the academics, and all of that. It's to teach these boys life lessons, which the school has taught me, and you. The wonderful staff that's been here have taught us those things and have equipped us for life.

And obviously, in our South Africa, our beloved South Africa, with all that's going on, and with every country on Earth that has its problems, we want to carry on keeping on with that message of hope. And we can do this, you know, the whole world. The majority of the people on this whole Earth, want it to work, too, and want to be in peace and want to live and reach out to one another and share all of it. So, we aim to show this through what we do with our music.

But then let's take it even further than that. Let's keep on doing music from all walks of life and other parts of the world. I think what we try to do is for our country, which is very important, but we also want to show the world that we sing all genres of music, all styles, whether it's Classical, Pop, African, or Afro-pop; it doesn't matter. Our message is not just for our country, but to show the world that people can work together, learn from one another, and benefit from one another in good positive ways.

And so looking at the choir today (we had a concert yesterday, by the way), like the traditional Wednesday concerts, which you know very well, and we had a concert on Friday as well; you have people walking out of the auditorium from all walks of life. And when I say, all walks of life, I mean our multicolored, multicultural, multiracial audiences. People walk out of a concert and say things like this absolutely shows the world that we've got hope because the Drakensberg Boys' Boys Choir is everything when it comes to multicultural diversity.

I'm not just talking about the different boys from different cultures in the choir, but also the music that we do. We try to do this thing that the Drakies has been so good at over all the many decades, which is to expose the boys to music from different cultures, not just in South Africa, but

from across the world. So, I do think that looking at the choir during a performance on social media, it's absolutely very clear that this is a picture not just for South Africa to learn from but the whole world, and it does give one hope to see this because these boys; they are the future leaders going forward.

Chapter 4: Themes

Chapter 4 identifies and explores themes that emerged through analyzing and restorying each interview. Creswell (2005:482)¹⁷⁰ asserts that the process of identifying themes takes the reader beyond the surface level of the interviews towards a deeper understanding of the prevailing concepts. I have identified five themes, or “pillars,” which help to answer the research question: did Drakies play a role in nation-building, and if they did, how did they do so? I structured the themes chronologically to create a clear narrative flow for the reader.

Theme one identifies the *initial heightened emotions* experienced by Mzwandile and Niekie at their early days at Drakies. Through the interviews, it became apparent that Mzwandile and Niekie had contrasting ways of thinking about racial integration because of their respective backgrounds with Niekie coming from a white home and Mzwandile coming from a black home. I discuss this in more detail in the *initial heightened emotions* theme section. Theme two describes *Questions of transformation* in the racial demographic and repertoire choices of the school and various implied motivations for those changes. Niekie was transformed by realizing he needed the help of his black peers, whereas before, he never thought he would need their help. Vaughan told me he believes Drakies, as a white school, transformed to be more inclusive by adopting traditional African music. Mzwandile believes the school transformed, but this transformation is not as sincere as people are led to believe. Theme three, *Ashley-Botha's seminal role in the school*, highlights Christian Ashley-Botha's pivotal role in the school and his influence over the interviewees' lives. Theme four discusses the move towards adopting a larger percentage of traditional African music in Drakies' programs. I have included Vaughan's story on how the traditional African music program evolved

¹⁷⁰ Creswell, “Narrative Research Designs,” 482.

at Drakies in theme two, *Questions of Transformation*, and in theme four, *Traditional African Music*, because it addresses both how Drakies transformed and the discussion of traditional African music at Drakies apparent in all three interviews. Theme five addresses the overarching question of whether the Drakensberg Boys Choir played a significant role in *nation-building*, as viewed through the eyes of each interviewee.

Initial Heightened Emotions

The first apparent theme that surfaced was Mzwandile and Niekie’s heightened emotions—and even surprise—related to their initial experiences at Drakies, striking enough that both individuals chose to dwell and continue to remember them vividly. To understand the discussion of this theme, it is worth pointing out that Mzwandile arrived at Drakies in 1986 as the first black boy in the school, and Niekie arrived in 1994 as a white boy after the change in racial demographics took place at the school when there were already a few black boys attending. Mzwandile was uncomfortable at Drakies for the first few months; however, as young children often will, they found a way to connect. The interviewees referred more to racial experiences outside Drakies, involving parents and audiences on tour.

Mzwandile said, “I remember I had much anxiety thinking about the school and arriving for the first time ... I could sense the friction when I got there¹⁷¹. Some parents said they did not want a ‘kaffir¹⁷²’ at their school showering with their boys. Some parents even threatened to take their boys out of the school.” Niekie, on the other hand, expressed that he had mentally prepared himself for the school to be almost entirely white yet was pleasantly surprised by the demography when

¹⁷¹ Christian Ashley-Botha discusses this friction about racial tensions with more detail in his book. Ashley-Botha, “The First Boys of Colour,” 51-52.

¹⁷² Derogatory word used in South Africa for a black person.

he arrived. Niekie said, “I remember the first day I arrived at Drakies ... thinking, ‘Okay, there’s quite a lot of black and non-white people in the school.’” He went on to say, “It didn't bother me ... but it struck me that there were blacks in the school.”

Interestingly, when they arrived, Mzwandile and Niekie came from vastly different musical backgrounds. Mzwandile recalls details of his musical background before he was accepted at Drakies; however, Niekie does not divulge his musical background. It can be assumed that Niekie had some musical experience, at least a reasonable voice, and could match pitch because, from my experience also having to audition, these three criteria are the minimum musical requirements needed to be accepted at Drakies¹⁷³. The song Christian Ashley-Botha¹⁷⁴ (the Artistic Director and senior conductor during that time) used most frequently¹⁷⁵ to audition boys and to grasp their vocal ability was “Silent Night,” because many young boys knew that song from attending or being part of church nativities guided by their parents¹⁷⁶.

Mzwandile shared evidence of a strong past musical background, such as his experience winning the “Golden Voice Competition.” According to Mzwandile, this competition was a vehicle of recruitment for the school, creating a substantive talent pool of boys with excellent vocal ability. Although not explicitly implied, my interpretation is that in the year Mzwandile was chosen as the winner of the competition, the school was already actively looking for its first black boy¹⁷⁷ and conveniently found one who was vocally talented. Mzwandile spoke with pride about his musical background before being accepted at Drakies by saying, “They didn't just take some Mickey Mouse or just some regular black boy, you know, because that very first year, in fact, at the end of

¹⁷³ We also wrote an academic test to be considered at Drakies.

¹⁷⁴ Christian Ashley-Botha's role at the school is discussed at length in Chapter 2 and in the *Ashley-Botha's seminal role in the school* theme of this chapter.

¹⁷⁵ To my knowledge.

¹⁷⁶ Most cultures in South Africa have a Christian tradition.

¹⁷⁷ I arrived at this conclusion through Ashley-Botha's book, *Drakie Stories*, when he says, “Back then we ran a colour-inclusive ‘Golden Voice’ competition.” Ashley-Botha (2014).

the first term I got my first professional stage production in Johannesburg¹⁷⁸. I was not just a regular black boy - I was a child star.” He also told me that many people attribute his musical ability and career success to him attending Drakies¹⁷⁹; however, he pointed out, “No, it’s not because of Drakies, It’s a combination of all those things¹⁸⁰. Drakies had just added so much to what I had already.” These words suggest that Mzwandile had a solid baseline level of confidence and agency, which may have aided him when transitioning to Drakies.

Questions of Transformation

Another theme that emerged while discussing the interviewees' initial experiences at Drakies was *Questions of Transformation*. Each interviewee had a specific story to describe meaningful administrative and artistic transformation that occurred at Drakies from 1985 to this present day. Niekie and Vaughan’s stories contain some similarities, both carrying a tone of positivity. For Niekie, it was his own attitude towards his black peers that changed through events discussed in more detail below. For Vaughan, it was the adopting of traditional African music in the program that transformed the school for the better. Mzwandile, however, noted that while the Drakie leadership (board of the school and staff members) did eventually transform to include black boys in the school, however, these choices were politically motivated for self-interest.

Niekie’s story of transformation described how his own attitude or thinking changed towards his black peers¹⁸¹. As mentioned in the theme of *Initial Heightened Emotions*, Niekie told

¹⁷⁸ Independently from Drakies.

¹⁷⁹ Which was a school only for white boys before he arrived there.

¹⁸⁰ His musical ability and experience before being accepted at Drakies – see Mzwandile’s story in Chapter 3 for full context.

¹⁸¹ To offer some background, Niekie is from the North-West province in South Africa (one of the provinces of South Africa sharing a border with Botswana), which still, today, has a staunch reputation as being more Afrikaner right-wing. It must be noted that Niekie has no affiliation with any right-wing organizations. Niekie is a respected musician in his community, who has always been racially inclusive. I am testament to this.

me he was “struck” to see boys of color at Drakies when he arrived, because there were no children of color at his previous school. Niekie offered more context about the political stance of some of his family members when he said, “I remember one elderly person in my family telling me [referring to when they saw how inclusive the Drakies school was], ‘So Niekie, are you becoming colorblind?’” Niekie being surprised to see black boys at Drakies when he arrived, and the ‘colorblind’ comment made by one of his family members may shed light on his initial way of thinking about black boys because of the political environment in which he found himself.

Niekie discussed how his mind was gradually transformed regarding his view of black peers. He describes an experience of reaching out to a black team-mate to translate and more deeply understand the relationship between his native Afrikaans and the Sesotho language portion of the National Anthem. In his words:

I remember going to one of the Rugby Fields with the sheet music¹⁸² and thinking, ‘How do I pronounce this? What is this *Morena boloka*¹⁸³?’ ... I had to go to one of my black friends and ask, ‘Listen, I know this is your language; you must help me now.’ ... He already knew “Uit die blou van onse hemel¹⁸⁴,’ so he didn’t need my help; I only needed his help. So, then you’re confronted the whole time with, ‘Okay, so now that things are beginning to change, we have to work together.’ ... now for the first time in my life, I needed something from him ... I didn’t think that I was going to need anything from them in the future, but I definitely did.

Vaughan emphasized that although Drakies accepted their first black boy in 1986, the idea of transformation was clearly already present. Vaughan said, “I do believe that the Drakensberg Boys’ Choir would have opened its doors to boys of all races even earlier, if possible ... if it weren’t for

¹⁸² Of the New South African National Anthem

¹⁸³ The Sesotho language part of the South African National Anthem.

¹⁸⁴ The Afrikaans language part of the South African National Anthem.

those times¹⁸⁵.” Vaughan recalls how the strict apartheid laws made it literally impossible for any school to admit both blacks and whites prior to the 1980s. By talking about the Drakie traditional African music program and how it evolved through the years¹⁸⁶, he offers insight into how Drakies transformed through adopting this program. Vaughan informed me that the first African program was performed in his grade 9 year¹⁸⁷, in 1985¹⁸⁸ whereafter he said, “That’s what I mean by the school was already geared for change and wanted to change,” and “Let’s do it¹⁸⁹ because the world is ready for it ... and since then, African music has always been a part of our set¹⁹⁰.” Through restorying Vaughan's interview¹⁹¹, I interpret this information to be an attempt by the school to be more inclusive towards black audiences and black boys attending the school. The school wanted to show the country and the world that they were ready for change, and that they were changing.

Mzwandile, however, offers a different opinion on the transformation of attitudes at Drakies. When discussing politics at Drakies, Mzwandile mentioned that during his time there, the school was not pressured to transform. He said, “They could choose to include or not include black boys as school members.” Through my interpretation of Mzwandile’s interview, I propose that Mzwandile felt he was ‘put on display’ to show the country and the world that the school was beginning to transform; however, he was still experiencing subtle or indirect signs of racism. An example of this, which he mentions, is the half-mast Drakie flag they displayed in respect for a white alumni’s father who recently died; however, when his father died, there was no half-mast flag put up. Another example is when the housemaster picked Mzwandile up from a Greyhound

¹⁸⁵ Referring to apartheid and its laws restricting white and black children attending school together.

¹⁸⁶ See the *Traditional African Music* theme for more information.

¹⁸⁷ Children in grade 9, in South Africa, have usually turned or are turning 15.

¹⁸⁸ The album, *Shosholozza: An African Adventure* tells us, however, that already in 1983 a “conscious decision” was made to start performing traditional African music. The Drakensberg Boys’ Choir, “*Shosholozza*.”

¹⁸⁹ The traditional African program.

¹⁹⁰ Opposed to not being a stand-alone set or program in its own right earlier on in the existence of the school.

¹⁹¹ Refer to restorying process in Chapter 1

bus stop to drive him to Drakies and appeared to be cold by not saying a word to him until they arrived. However, the same housemaster was first in line to receive praise, when the public congratulated the school on having a black boy as a member. Mzwandile implied that Drakies transformed when it was most convenient for them. Even during his time at Drakies as a boy (Mzwandile did not specify the exact year), he recalls hearing a teacher say from the back of the bus, while on tour, assert that the African National Congress (abbreviated as ANC, the political party which Nelson Mandela was president of) were terrorists:

I remember a particular time when I was having a political argument with some of my peers, and they were saying, “Ja, but the ANC are terrorists, you know.” And while arguing, one teacher at the back said, “But they are terrorists, Zwai.” After I left the school in 1995, hearing that Drakies was excited to be performing at the Rugby World Cup opening and for Mandela visiting the school, I thought, “Ja, I remember exactly when they said Mandela was a terrorist.”

In other words, Mzwandile felt that school members—both boys and staff—had a prevailing fear and negative perception of Nelson Mandela, even up to the day of his release. They quickly changed their perception of Mandela¹⁹² as if to ‘go with the flow’ when they benefited from being included in major events such as the 1995 Rugby World Cup opening. Mzwandile did, however, say that he is still proud of being the first black boy at the school and, according to my interpretation, he believes that he set the standard when it came to the school transforming (including black boys), as he said, “Little did I know that I was also paving the way for other black boys who would attend later too.”

As the author of this document, one memory I have that reveals how Drakies could have managed transformation better occurred while the choir was on tour in the northeastern part of

¹⁹² In South Africa it is appropriate to refer to Nelson Mandela ‘Mandela’

South Africa in 2001. We arrived at a little town called *Ermelo*, about 215 kilometers south-east of Johannesburg. When waiting to meet our hosts, I remember how all the white boys' names were called out to meet their hosts; however, the black boys were left behind with no host parents who wanted to host them. I remember how angry and disgusted I was at the age of fourteen that my friends were not being hosted. The black boys were forced to stay and sleep on the bus, while their white friends were taken to warm homes with meals and beds. But I had no idea what to do or say at that point. It was the first time we, as that generation of Drakie boys, had encountered such blatant racism outside of the school but directed at the Drakie boys of color.

That afternoon, between lunch and our compulsory afternoon nap, we had the usual sit down with our host parents so that they could get to know us. I remember how my host 'father' said, "*Ons glo nie dis reg om die swart seuns in ons huis te he nie.*" This translates from Afrikaans as "We do not believe it is right to have the black boys stay in our home." I could not believe what I had just heard. I thought to myself, "Really, even in 2001?" I was so angry I could not sleep that afternoon. The next day after the concert, one of the staff members gathered us on the bus as we were leaving and said, "This is the last time we will accept that our black boys are not hosted. If one boy is not accepted, then none of us are." It made us feel better that he said that; however, I regret not standing in solidarity with my friends and demanding that I stay on the bus with them.

Ashley-Botha's seminal role in the school

Mzwandile and Vaughan mentioned how Christian 'Bunny'¹⁹³ Ashley-Botha (1944-2014) clearly influenced the school and/or their lives. Generally, Christian 'Bunny' Ashley-Botha's influence is apparent when considering that he was known as Maestro or Maestro Bunny to the boys and the alumni who graduated from the school (like Mzwandile, Niekie, and Vaughan). However, Niekie did not talk about or name Maestro Bunny specifically; instead, he talked about the school's leadership in general being the driving force in Drakies' role in nation-building¹⁹⁴. For this reason, this theme focuses on Mzwandile and Vaughan's story.

As Vaughan discussed the traditional African program and how it evolved over the years, he mentioned Maestro Bunny and his direct influence at the school, specifically on the traditional African program. He said:

Look, because I've been involved with the school for 41 years, I saw what happened. The Director of Music and conductor Christian Ashley-Botha for nearly 27 years, built a lot of things up here, including the African music program. He had a vision. You know, he was sort of ahead of his time in all genres of music, not just African music. He was just on it and that good at seeing a way forward.

Mzwandile offered a reflective, sincere appreciation for Maestro Bunny during his interview. He said that even though parents showed resistance because the school was allowing the acceptance of a black boy, with some parents even threatening to take their boy out of the school, Bunny stuck to what he believed was needed for change. In his own words, "Bunny just said, 'So be it.' Bunny did not take no for an answer." Mzwandile went further in his appreciation for

¹⁹³ 'Bunny' was Ashley-Botha's nickname throughout his life and used by most people.

¹⁹⁴ See the theme *Nation-Building*, for the full discussion on the topic.

Maestro Bunny by saying, “What a man ... What a smart man ... Bunny knew what was working,” when referring to how he would perform folk songs and the National Anthem of the country they would visit. Mzwandile believed Maestro Bunny was successful with his international Drakie choir tours because he sang music people in the country could relate to.

Mzwandile also said that he learned much from Maestro Bunny during his time at Drakies:

Bunny Ashley Botha was a well of knowledge for me, not just in musical terms, but he applied methods and systems in order to get a particular result. And I was intrigued by the systems that he applied, you know, in achieving. I've seen it work or rather I've applied it even when I was at St. Stithians College, which was completely a Rugby School until I got there¹⁹⁵.

I resonate with Mzwandile and Vaughan’s accounts on Maestro Bunny because I, too, saw and experienced the workings of this man who had a vision for the school. I can testify that we learned several Japanese folk songs before we went to Japan in 2001 and 2002, which was a hit when we sang them there. I also remember how the traditional African music program was highly favored in Japan, as we always had a whole house with standing ovations for every performance. The choice to include folk material from the countries we visited on tour showed cultural sensitivity and openness to working with choral music outside of the Western canon.

I remember Maestro Bunny taking great care of how we presented ourselves at school behind the scenes and in public, offering us a rich musical education through the ‘systems’ he put in place. His goal was clearly to make the choir excellent and to help the school function meticulously so that the boys could also have time to be active in sports and receive a standard school education. One such system was ‘Concert Status,’ which every new boy (those attending Drakies for their

¹⁹⁵ Mzwandile is referring to how he introduced and develop music clubs at the school, which before his time there, was mainly focused on rugby.

first year) had to achieve by going through twenty musical tests, each more difficult than the last before he was permitted to sing with the concert choir. Tests included learning music theory, basics of conducting patterns, intervals, chords, time signatures, sight-singing, Italian and German music terms, how to behave while on tour, and everything a boy would have to know to succeed as a Drakie chorister.

Traditional African Music

All interviewees discussed the traditional African second half that became part of the Drakie signature. Through my interpretation, Vaughan and Mzwandile said that adopting an entire traditional African program was politically motivated, whether to help unite the country or secure funding from a new emerging black government.

In his interview, Vaughan took me through the origins of the traditional African music set they adopted in 1985 and how it evolved to what it is today. He told me Drakies had always been doing traditional African music from the beginning (*Shosholoza - An African Adventure* (2020) 27)¹⁹⁶, although it was not utilized in an entire uninterrupted program until 1985. Vaughan's discussion of the program implies that he was proud of Drakie's formation of a tradition of passing the music down from generation to generation without notating music, as is customary in many South African traditions. Vaughan also shared how Drakies had advanced to having two traditional African music programs alternated each week for their Wednesday concert, sets A and B; however, they recently created a third set (C). This set C includes live instruments, such as piano (or keyboard), guitar, bass guitar, and brass instruments, to accompany the music they call Afro-pop. He said, "So, Afro-pop is Johnny Clegg, Miriam Makeba, Mango Groove, even *Daar Kom Die Alibama*¹⁹⁷ ... to

¹⁹⁶ *Shosholoza - An African Adventure*.

¹⁹⁷ Music from Cape Town

mention a few ... there's a whole different vibe to it." He said that the boys wear "township vibes" clothing one would have seen in the 50s and 60s (Ellapen, 2007:122, Feldstein:2013:15-24).

Through Vaughan's story, I believe Drakies aims to cater to all South Africans by being inclusive in their chosen repertoire. It is interesting to note how different Drakies' approach towards inclusivity is compared to Walton's (2004)¹⁹⁸ article, which tells us that only Western Art Music was considered worthy of the Afrikaner ear and reserved for white people (or the white elite) to share. Vaughan confirmed Drakie's approach to racial inclusivity through music when he said, "If you listen to the end, you also partake in this music." This one sentence implies that all races are invited to partake in this music and that Drakies' aim is to unify South Africa through performing it. He also said, "And the main thing about it [referring to this new traditional African set] is to say 'This is us' to South Africa. This is South Africa." In other words, this music is representative of what and who South Africans are, not this elitist white Western Art Music, which was only reserved for white people.

Mzwandile approached the topic of traditional African music more from a business perspective. He believed that Drakies was wise in doing traditional African music because "You know what you need to do to get funding." Mzwandile did, however, add:

But it is beautiful when it dawns on me. We all had an awakening moment at some point. I'd like to believe that the school as well had that. And so, it brought about just, 'Wow, how great is this?' I mean, dude, when you watch those kids now ... the first half is all singing choir stuff, but the whole second half is African music. And now it's, like, choreographed. Everything is just like, 'Wow.' And if I say, 'Wow.' I mean, 'Wow.'

¹⁹⁸ Walton, "Bond of Broeders."

Niekie described how singing Shosholoza with Nelson Mandela dancing in front of him on Champagne Castle helped him realize he was part of “a whole new movement ... part of history.” However, as Niekie discussed the Drakie traditional African set, it became clear he wanted to separate the politics from the music. Niekie’s discussion on the Drakie traditional African set highlighted the idea that Drakies adopted this program because it “is great art” and not because change was needed in the school. Niekie believed that the politics occurring outside the school in the country were in no way related to their choice to sing traditional African music.

Clear evidence to support my interpretation of this is found in his words, “I do not think ... the second half [the African traditional program] was in any way politically motivated or saying, ‘All right, look, what this choir is bringing in now and singing for us, the African music because they have now transformed.’”

My experience is that Drakies were aware of the change occurring in the country. Maestro Bunny was smart enough to know that he needed to change the school to keep Drakies relevant and updated with the changing times, even if it was only for monetary reasons, as Mzwandile suggests. The fruits of these changes were apparent not only in creating a more enlightened, inclusive cultural frame of mind but in the opportunities afforded to school members. I remember, as a boy, meeting Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, Miriam Makeba, and many more famous apartheid activists because of the relationship we had with them because of our inclusive traditional African music set.

Nation-Building

At some point during the interview, I asked Mzwandile, Niekie, and Vaughan if they believe Drakies played a role in nation-building or if they still play a role in nation-building (I asked the latter question if I sensed they had indicated that Drakies did play a role in nation-building). All three interviewees agreed that Drakies played a role in nation-building but had different opinions of how this occurred.

It was clear that Mzwandile believed that Drakies had a role in nation-building because they were racially inclusive as he said, “When you look at Drakies, they are the most rainbow-ish¹⁹⁹,” however, he credited this inclusivity to the school’s need to look right to secure funding²⁰⁰. My interpretation of this information is that Mzwandile considers the choir an excellent example of what South Africa should look like through their racial inclusivity, which in turn offers hope to South Africa because the choir has significant influence in the country as a celebrity choir, which he associates with nation-building. However, he is convinced their role in nation-building was not because Drakies *wanted to change* but because they *had to change*. Mzwandile went on to say that Drakies still have a lot of reflection to do when it comes to actual sincere and effective change because the school’s board²⁰¹ is still primarily white, implying that white boys still benefit more than black boys in the school.

Niekie’s perspective is that when he arrived at the school, they were already “colorblind,” meaning the color of a boy’s skin was not an issue. He commented, “I mean, we slept in the same rooms, we shared the same bathrooms, which was unusual for South Africa at that stage²⁰².” As

¹⁹⁹ South Africans, especially media, often called South Africa, “The Rainbow Nation.” AfricaNews, 2022.

²⁰⁰ Through being hired to perform for political or government events, or receiving money from the government to fund black boys at the school.

²⁰¹ South African education law requires a board or governing body to govern the school. This body hires staff members, draw up policies to govern the school and seek funding to maintain the school among other responsibilities.

²⁰² That stage being in 1994-1995.

mentioned in the *Ashley-Botha's seminal role in the school* theme, he did say that he believed Drakies played a role in nation-building, but the school leadership (staff members and grade 9's²⁰³) should take most of the credit. I believe he said this because he also mentioned, "You don't know what's actually happening at that stage, at that age." In other words, he felt he was too young to grasp the actual positive change Drakies was contributing to the nation. Niekie also admitted that change in the school may have occurred because of pressure put on staff members by the Board²⁰⁴, so that they could secure funding.

However, Niekie does believe that Drakies had a significant part in one of the most important events in South African history, which helped nation-building during a very fragile political time. This event is the 1995 Rugby World Cup. The movie *Invictus*, directed by Clint Eastwood and starring Morgan Freeman and Matt Damon, tells the epic story of how South Africa won the 1995 Rugby World Cup and, in doing so, unified the country still wrought with fear and division²⁰⁵. Niekie, who was there experiencing all of this, told me how Drakies was the first musical body to sing and introduce the new South African National Anthem to the country and the world. Niekie said he doesn't believe Drakies played a significant role in nation-building; however, they were part of a major event that contributed significantly towards nation-building. Niekie describes the moment South Africa won the 1995 World Cup:

And for the first time, you will see people in the street, blacks, whites, together, wearing the same clothes, waving the same flag. So, I don't think we influenced nation-building, but we were definitely part of experiencing a very dramatic process of nation-building.

²⁰³ Grade 9's are the senior boys of the school taking leadership positions as prefect in the school and the choir. I was a prefect at the school.

²⁰⁴ Or governing body of the school.

²⁰⁵ "Invictus (2009) - Plot - IMDb."

Through discussing nation-building with Vaughan, I believe he is of the opinion that Drakies still play a role in nation-building by being a symbol of hope (AfricaNews, 2022)²⁰⁶. He affirmed this opinion by saying, “In our South Africa, our beloved South Africa, with all that’s going on, and with every country on Earth that has its problems, we want to carry on keeping on with that message of hope.” His message of hope, or nation-building, extends to the world when he said, “Our message is not just for our country, but to show the world that people can work together, learn from one another, and benefit from one another in good positive ways.” My interpretation of Vaughan’s message of hope is that present Drakie members and old boys believe they do carry the title of nation-builders, perhaps because of the school’s past nation-building endeavors (whether it be a direct or indirect influence), and because of this, now qualify as symbols of hope to the rest of the world.

Conclusion

In discussing the five themes of *Initial heightened emotions*, *Questions of Transformation*, *Ashley-Botha’s seminal role in the school*, *Traditional African Music*, and *Nation-Building*, I shared similarities and sometimes contradictions between the opinions and views of the participants. Niekie and Vaughan view the Drakies' transformation through a positive lens, acknowledging its role in nation-building; however, Mzwandile questions the sincerity of this transformation. Mzwandile and Vaughan agree on the legacy Maestro Bunny left at Drakies and his wisdom in adopting traditional African music, even though Mzwandile believes it may have been to secure funding. Nevertheless, for different reasons, all interviewees agree that Drakies played a role in nation-building, either by being racially inclusive already at an early stage during

²⁰⁶ AfricaNews, “South Africa’s Drakensberg Boys School Choir Performs Live.”

the tense political time with the end of apartheid or through its adoption of an uninterrupted traditional African music program, which displayed unity among different races, or by its current message of hope they communicate through this same music.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

Inspiration for this research

The first clue of how I realized Drakies influenced me regarding racial integration in my adult life was at a vocal ensemble gig we did at a white church in Klerksdorp, South Africa, in 2011, around May or June. The ensemble consisted of white Afrikaans and black singers from the Potchefstroom area (also the home of my alma mater), about a forty-five-minute drive outside Klerksdorp. I was standing with the ensemble's black members, talking to them about how well they dressed and presented themselves and getting tips on how to dress as well as they did. For example, they advised me to wear a belt with my suit. After one of the black singers advised me to wear a belt, he handed me his belt and said, "Here, Marshall, take it because it makes you look good." I reluctantly took it because I knew his financial circumstances and how he and my other black colleagues struggled to eat and survive while trying to get a music degree; however, I took it as a sign of goodwill between colleagues.

Then, one of my other black colleagues standing with us said, "Marshall, why are you the only one speaking to us?" I paused, looked around, and realized there seemed to be a chasm of distance between the other white ensemble members and us. I had never noticed that before, but afterward, I realized that on other occasions, the white and black members of the ensemble would always be physically divided in the room. The same guy who asked me this question said, "I know why you're the only one speaking to us, Marshall. It's because you went to the Drakensberg Boys' Choir."

I have always suspected Drakies being a symbol of hope and nation-building in South Africa through the high-ranking officials, such as Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu, and black South African celebrities, such as Miriam Makeba and Hugh Masekela, with whom we rubbed shoulders.

This matters because it means that Drakies was part of something tremendous that helped smooth the transition from apartheid to the “New South Africa,” irrespective of how small of a role we may have played in it. It matters because it is an example of how something as small as Drakies, with the right vision and leadership, can have far-reaching consequences in people’s lives, as shown in the success of the Bala Brothers and how people perceive Drakies today.

My findings

The literature review implies that Drakies served and still serves as a symbol of national unity and a nation-building vehicle for South Africans. One piece of information that stood out was Njanji’s article, *In Troubled South Africa, a Boys’ Choir Gives Cause for Hope*, where she quotes a historian²⁰⁷ saying, “In that choir, you hear the rainbow voices,” referring to Desmond Tutu using the words ‘Rainbow Nation,’ for the people of South Africa. However, I wanted to search deeper than articles written by people who are only bystanders, creating their own opinions about Drakies through what they see and hear. To create more depth in this research, I reached out to Drakie alums Mzwandile Bala, Niekie van der Walt, and Vaughan van Zyl²⁰⁸, who agreed to have an interview with me to talk about their experiences at Drakies in connection to nation-building. After interviewing each participant, I ‘restored’ the interviews to make sense of the raw data²⁰⁹. I then created five themes from the ‘restored’ interviews. These five themes are, *Initial heightened emotions*, *Questions of Transformation*, *Ashley-Botha’s seminal role in the school*, *Traditional African Music*, and *Nation-Building*. All five themes are connected and point to Drakies and their role in nation-building.

²⁰⁷ She mentions “historian Ntuli,” but she is unclear to which person she is precisely referring.

²⁰⁸ See Chapters 3 and 4 for a more detailed description of who these men are.

²⁰⁹ Creswell, “Narrative Research Designs,” 482.

Mzwandile's and Niekie's first experiences at Drakies reveal the school's starting point and its progression of racial inclusivity. The starting point was when Mzwandile arrived at the school, which confronted white staff, parents, and boys with the reality of having a black boy as a member of the school for the first time. Niekie's surprise (as a white boy who never attended a school with black children before) at seeing black boys at Drakies is a sign of the progression of racial inclusivity at the school that was already in motion.

The theme of transformation ran through each interview; however, it was discussed differently, with each interviewee having their idea of what transformation looked like at Drakies and only Mzwandile using the actual word 'transform.' I was inspired by Mzwandile's use of the word to create this theme. I use the term transformation to refer to racial inclusivity, which includes racial demographics and the inclusion of traditional African culture.

A tone of transformation was evident in Niekie's attitude towards his black teammates, as he realized he needed their help with understanding and pronouncing the native South African languages of the National Anthem. He says that for the first time, he realized that he needed their help, and they did not need his. The implication is this was a humbling experience, helping him recognize we all need each other's help somewhere along the road of life. Also worth noting is that Niekie's experience offers a glimpse into the unfair educational requirements placed on black children, compared to white children, by the apartheid's educational system. Niekie's black peer knew the Afrikaans part of the National Anthem (which was part of the old National Anthem, *Die Stem*), even though it was not his native language because he was required to know it. For context, the 1976 'Soweto Uprising' resulted from black school children protesting against having to receive instruction in Afrikaans²¹⁰.

²¹⁰ Pohlandt-McCormick, Helena, "Controlling Woman: Winnie Mandela and the 1976 Soweto Uprising," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 33, no. 3 (2000): 585–614, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3097436>.

In Vaughan's interview, he talked about how, in 1985, Drakies wanted to meet South Africa's and the world's expectations to see a change to the oppressive apartheid system. According to Vaughan, Drakies' response to this expectation was to adopt an uninterrupted traditional African program that would function independently of the rest of the program they sang at concerts, showing racial transformation in the school by catering to black audience members and showing the world they were embracing African culture. Mzwandile believes that when he attended the school, they were not serious about transformation because there was no pressure put on them to do so. This allowed for racial micro-aggressions to go unnoticed within the school's system²¹¹. Mzwandile, however, says regardless of Drakies not being serious about transformation, he is still proud to be a Drakie alum because his attendance at Drakies inspired other black boys to attend, further helping the process of transformation at the school.

Christian 'Bunny' Ashley-Botha was mentioned as significantly influencing the direction of the school and their lives. Vaughan said that Ashley-Botha had a vision for the school in leading it forward to inclusivity. The literature review shows that Ashley-Botha was adamant about transforming the school's racial demographic and the leading figure who adopted traditional African music at Drakies (Ashley-Botha, 2014:51-54)²¹². Mzwandile confirms this by saying that Ashley-Botha "Did not take no for an answer." Mzwandile also talked about how Ashley-Botha would include folk music from the country they visited in the choir's repertoire, which implies he was more than willing to deviate from the traditional Western art music canon, a canon the apartheid government reserved for the 'white elite' (Walton (2004:73)²¹³. Mzwandile and Vaughan

²¹¹ Refer to *Questions of Transformation* in Chapter 4 more detail on this.

²¹² Ashley-Botha, *Drakie Stories*, 53-54.

²¹³ Walton, Chris, "Bond of Broeders: Anton Hartman and Music in an Apartheid State," *The Musical Times* 145, no. 1887 (2004): 73, <https://doi.org/10.2307/4149148>.

discuss Ashley-Botha's advocacy for change, new ideas, and inclusivity in opposition to the parents of the school and the apartheid regime.

The traditional African music sung at Drakies was another prevailing theme in all three interviews. During his interview, Vaughan enthusiastically discussed the evolution of Drakies' traditional African program, starting at a complete set in 1985 for a tour to Greece, then evolving to two sets, and eventually changing into three sets, with the third set dedicated to Afro-pop (as he calls it); including music from Mango Groove, Miriam Makeba, Hugh Masekela, and other black South African artists. Mzwandile said that he thinks the traditional African program sounds and looks absolutely astounding, which in his opinion, is needed to receive funding from the government and other patrons. Niekie reflected on the time he sang *Shosholoz*a for Nelson Mandela on top of Champagne Castle, one of the Drakensberg Mountain peaks, which made him realize (years later) that he was part of something big and new in the country at the time – the transition from apartheid to the “New South Africa.” Contrary to Vaughan and Mzwandile implying the traditional program at Drakies was brought in for change or monetary reasons, Niekie holds no belief that the inclusion of this program was politically motivated. Instead, he believes that the music represents “great art,” which is why Drakies included it in their program.

I included *Nation-Building* as a theme in Chapter 4 because I expressly asked the participants if they believed Drakies had a part in nation-building or if they still think Drakies have a role in nation-building. Mzwandile said he believes Drakies did play and is still playing a role in nation-building; however, he sees surface-level efforts regarding how they play this role. He believes Drakies, like the rest of the country, still have much room for growth, weeding out white privilege and creating systems where not only white boys will benefit. The system he mentions explicitly is the Board of the School, in which he hopes to see more racial diversity in the future.

When analyzing Niekie's interview and considering my interpretation of the nuances communicated, I believe Niekie thinks that Drakies played some role in nation-building. However, he passes the buck of this role in nation-building to the school's leadership and participation in the 1995 Rugby World Cup, which he considers more of a significant role of nation-building in South Africa. I suspect he shifts Drakies' responsibility in nation-building because I get the impression that he wants to separate Drakies from the politics of the plight. Niekie mentioned several times in the interview when referring to singing traditional African music, the inclusion of black boys at Drakies, and the racial demographic representation of the choir when touring that decisions concerning these aspects were not politically motivated. Niekie, like many white South Africans, applies a negative connotation to politics, perhaps because of the 'blame game' put on new-generation white South Africans for the wrongs of apartheid, the declining economy of the country, the uprise of crime and unemployment, and the inadequacy of the corrupt South African government to deal with these issues. For Niekie, Drakies represent excellence through what they sing and how they sing it, not because of why they sing it. I believe he wants to separate anything negative from that image of Drakies.

Vaughan, on the other hand (also being a white South African), acknowledges politics in the music Drakies' sings because he talks about extending the "message of hope" to the country "with all that's going on." Vaughan spoke about Drakies' ongoing aspiration for nation-building when he said, "Our message is not just for our country, but to show the world that people can work together, learn from one another, and benefit from one another in good positive ways."

In the literature, including various articles, Drakies was called the most racially inclusive choir²¹⁴. Themes gathered from interviews indicate that Drakies played and still play a role in

²¹⁴ AfricaNews, "South Africa's Drakensberg Boys School Choir Performs Live." AFP, "Boys' Choir Gives Cause for Hope."

nation-building. Drakies' role in nation-building may not have been consequential to the point of changing politics or abolishing apartheid laws, but it serves as a significant example of how everyone is needed to create change in an unjust society. This example includes Drakies being demographically diverse starting in the 1980s (defying apartheid laws), transforming to be racially inclusive through the way they looked and what they sang, having a strong leader such as Christian 'Bunny' Ashley-Botha with a vision for transformation, and being aware of the responsibility towards nation-building as a racially diverse institution.

Suggestions for further study

The South African presidency acknowledges Christian 'Bunny' Ashley Botha (1944-2014) as having a significant role in nation-building by including black boys in the choir school when it was against the law at the time and influencing the Bala Brothers to become the South African singing celebrities, they are today²¹⁵. This musician and leader has a fascinating story, and a whole case study would be appropriate to study how he influenced the school, South Africa, and the international community.

Another study worth considering is researching the happenings of living old boys (Drakie alums) and how they still play a role in nation-building. For this study, two names come to mind – Michael Barrett and Ralf Schmitt, who have arranged many traditional South African songs and continue producing excellent work locally and internationally.

It is worth researching the demographics of choirs in South Africa, the functions of the ensembles, what repertoire they sing, and why they sing it. I have studied this topic for my Master's degree; however, South African choirs are continually changing with the political climate, so any

²¹⁵ "Christian Ashley-Botha (1944 -) | The Presidency."

updated research would help conductors understand their choirs and program music more effectively.

The ongoing ‘struggle’

One interesting statement that Mzwandile made during his interview is: "There's still a lot of comfort for the previously privileged [meaning those who benefited from apartheid] ... that was stolen from everyone else. And, and we are judged and looked at based on class and level of position." The point Mzwandile makes is evident in the lack of resources to meet basic needs, such as lack of food, which black choir members still face throughout South Africa. I remember a black colleague from my alma mater, The North-West University²¹⁶, telling me she had not eaten for days. She told me she would drink water to make herself feel full to concentrate in class.

Amoateng *et al* (2015:53)²¹⁷ point out, "There is a statistically significant association between levels of urbanization and the likelihood of food deprivation in South Africa." Davids *et al* (2013:1202)²¹⁸ support Amoateng *et al's* claim on "food deprivation in South Africa" by writing, "South Africa continues to be characterized by significant levels of inequality and vulnerability to falling into poverty." Black choir members are not immune to these statistics because many still find themselves in areas that lack resources to meet basic human needs. After all, the effects of apartheid's segregation policies can still be seen today through the demography of where people live in South Africa.

²¹⁶ South Africa, Potchefstroom campus

²¹⁷ Amoateng, Acheampong Yaw, and Boitumelo Marilyn Patience Setlalentoa, "Family Structure, Race, Gender and Poverty: The Case of Food Deprivation in South Africa," *African Sociological Review / Revue Africaine de Sociologie* 19, no. 1 (2015): 16–33.

²¹⁸ Davids, Yul Derek, and Amanda Gouws. "Monitoring Perceptions of the Causes of Poverty in South Africa." *Social Indicators Research* 110, no. 3 (2013): 1201–20.

There is, however, hope, or as I discuss in this dissertation, efforts towards nation-building when we look at *The Ndlovu Youth Choir*²¹⁹, a choir in South Africa directed by Ralf Schmitt, a Drakie old boy (alum) from 1997. Schmitt was a student conductor at Drakies during my time there (in 2001). Thereafter, he attended and graduated from the University of Pretoria in 2006 with a bachelor's in music specializing in vocal jazz. Today, he mainly focuses on *The Ndlovu Youth Choir*, who have made multiple appearances on the reality television show “America’s Got Talent” (2019 and 2023) and performed with international celebrities such as Kygo. The choir’s specialty is taking existing hit songs, such as Kygo’s remix of Whitney Houston’s “Higher Love” or Ed Sheeran’s “Shape of You,” and adding Zulu or Xhosa text to it, adding a traditional South African ‘flavor’ to the mix.

*The Ndlovu Youth Choir*²²⁰ website offers a back story of the choir, saying:

An eleven-year journey has seen an after-school programme for orphaned and vulnerable children, started by the Ndlovu Care Group, transform into an international recording and touring career. Participation does not only instill values of togetherness, a work ethic and a sense of responsibility, but it develops self-discipline, self-confidence, and leadership. Through the choir, choristers gain a global perspective that offers an early pathway to artistic and professional achievement. The choir uses their talents to share their inspirational story with the world through song and dance²²¹.

The above text may seem like another rag-to-riches story; however, when one considers where the choir started, in an impoverished area in South Africa, and how successful they are today, this is yet another example of how one person with vision and strong leadership can make a difference in the community and the world at large.

²¹⁹ “Ndlovu Youth Choir.” Accessed November 21, 2023. <https://www.choir.africa/>.

²²⁰ “Ndlovu Youth Choir.”

²²¹ “Ndlovu Youth Choir.”

Final thoughts

All three interviewees believe that Drakies played a role in nation-building, being directly or indirectly involved to some extent. However, Drakies is not an institution without mistakes, and some believe the school has more profound transformation work to do. Still, when people look at and hear Drakies live and through the media, they experience a model, or “a face of unity,” of what South Africans strive for someday. However, all the media coverage Drakies has received over the years only tells part of the story. What matters more than articles or editorials is the unequivocal fact that Drakies was a racially inclusive group. The Drakie example of community-building also lends itself to the premise that a choir is a natural body where communities are made, and it is a group by which we, as conductors and singers, aim to move people’s hearts. This is an example of the power of community. This is an example of the power of song.

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Addendum

Raw Interviews – including permission asked and granted by the interviewees to use their recorded words in this dissertation (highlighted in yellow)

Mzwandile Bala

Wed, Oct 18, 2023, 2:23 PM • 51:07

- 00:45 Speaker 2: For the record, do I have your permission to use your words in this interview for my dissertation?
- 00:56 Speaker 1: Yeah, sure. Yes. Yes.
- 01:00 Speaker 2: Thanks. And these questions are open-ended, which means that I want to hear your experience. These questions just serve as a guideline and what we may find is as we speak, we would answer questions already, or answer questions that we would have got to or we'll open new questions up. So, I want to hear your accounts-
- 01:24 Speaker 1: Okay
- 01:25 Speaker 2: And I want to hear your experience.
- 01:28 Speaker 1: Alright. Sorry-
- 01:31 Speaker 2: Thirdly, could you state your name?
- 01:37 Speaker 1: Full Name, Mzwandile Bala, otherwise known as Zwai Bala in professional terms.
- 01:46 Speaker 2: Great. Perfect. Thank you. And so, I'll just ask you to spell that for me later. I'll probably just send a WhatsApp message or text for that.
- 01: 57 Speaker 1: Okay.
- 01:58 Speaker 2: And then when did you attend the Drakensberg Boys Choir?
- 02:03 Speaker 1: I attended the Drakensberg Boys Choir from 1988 to 1991.

02:13 Speaker 2: Great. Perfect. Thank you. Okay, well, thank you for that Zwai. Let's go straight into the questions. So, I've already sent this to you but I'm going to read it again. According to media and other documented reports, the Drakensberg Boys Choir, which I'll refer to now as DBCS became a symbol of hope for the South African nation towards the end of apartheid and is still considered so today. One article says that DBCS is nicknamed the rainbow voices in connection to the rainbow nation, a term Desmond Tutu attributed to post-apartheid South Africa. So, the first question going right into it would be do you agree or disagree with this statement? And please explain why you agree or disagree.

03:05 Speaker 1: Um, do I speak honestly, or do I speak diplomatically?

03:10 Speaker 2: No, I want you to speak as honestly, as you want to.

03:16 Speaker 1: Yeah.

03:17 Speaker 2: So, yeah. Yeah.

03:18 Speaker 1: Yeah. So, I think it was... Yes, it became... When you look at the Drakensberg, it's the most rainbow-ish looking, it's very exemplary of that. It fits that description very much. Even though I think it was by fluke. [chuckle] It was by chance. When I went to the school in 1988. Bunny Ashley Botha, the previous year, after having entered the Golden Voice Competition, that... And Bunny said he wants me at the school. And there were no black boys at the time. And, there was a lot of friction. Some parents saying they cannot have a kaffir at their school, showering with their boys... Whara, Whara, Whara, you know, the story. And, I mean, I didn't even need to be told that. I mean, I sensed some of it when I got there. So, it was definitely not a... There was no need for that. There was no transformation pressure or anything, it was just that like, "Do we want them or do we not? We can choose to not want." But, bless his soul, Bunny didn't take a no for an answer and just said, "Well..." Some parents were threatening to take their boys out the school and so it was like, "So be it". And thank God everything worked out. Also, they didn't just take some Mickey Mouse or just some regular black boy, because that very first year, in fact, end of the first term I got my first professional stage production in Johannesburg, where some of the boys have been...

Bunny, when they were on tour with the Drakensberg... With the Ashley, I mean with the Ashley Botha Choir, which is his choir. They came to see my show at the Standard Bank Arena. It was like a full house... It was the first time South Africa had an indoor arena. And

there I was being a star... A child star there and getting standing ovations every night with not less than 5000 people every night. So, it was an eye-opener for many people. I mean, I remember Mr. Gouws, who was the... [Ronny Gouws?], who was the headmaster at the time. I mean, I remember early in the year when he came with Attie Odendaal, who was the housemaster, to come and pick me up from the bus... The Greyhound bus in Estcourt because I came a day later than the other boys.

Because I was taking a Greyhound bus from the Eastern Cape, stayed with one of the parents in Durban, and then took another bus up. And they came to fetch me. The guy didn't say a single word. He didn't say a single word to me, like until we got to the school. And opening night of King Africa, the musical, just a couple of months later, he was there as the guest of honor cheers'ing everyone with wine, and on the program, it said, "Courtesy of the Drakensberg Boys Choir School". And I guess he was representing the school. So, a lot of the perception that yeah, was changed, but not... Still, it wasn't like, more like exposing or displaying or bragging about having a black boy. It was like "Hey, we have a boy there."

But, I mean, that was the same year that my father passed away, he passed away actually during the run. And when I came back in the second half, like second term, one of the old boys' father died. And there was this whole thing like, half-mast flag and everything, but I was like "ag okay, it's how things go". I, thank God, at least I was a lot more mature. And I had... In ANC they call it "Rabula", I was struggle-conscious, you know? And I could tell "Okay, this is really an issue just with the system. The boys weren't necessarily racist, it's just how the system was. And I could check with some of the stories I'd tell them that they had no clue how serious everything was.

And my brother joined me two years later with a few other boys, including, Xola Ntshinga, who's a sports presenter on M-net, and Xola Ntshinga counting four, together with my brother. So that was kind of like, the beginning. But, I mean there was certainly still a lot... Khumbula, you must remember the community goes beyond the school it goes to parents, it goes to the places we'd perform at. So even, I mean they had to be strategic even in how they placed the black boys.

So you know everything... But, I mean, I can tell exactly what's going on from under the radar. So I mean, even when... I remember in the bus, a couple of times when... I remember this

one particular time we were having a political argument with some of my peers and they were going on about like, "Yeah, but the ANC are terrorists". And they know fuck all, I mean these kids, especially the kids let alone the parents and the adults they know absolutely nothing. So as I was arguing with them and one teacher, I won't mention their name, but from the back, he was like "Yes, but they are Zwai". [chuckle] "They are terrorists".

So, for me when I just left the school in 1995, and they at... performing at the World Cup opening, it's like "Oh!" and Mandela visits the school and I'm like, "I remember exactly when they said Mandela was a terrorist". And I even remember the day Mandela was released from prison, we were all watching it from the caravan park at the bottom and the vibe was like... I remember one boy, an Afrikaans boy said, as he came out, like, "Wooh, Hier kom kak nou my broer". [chuckle] You know that South Africa is about to see shit. This guy's like being released... So, I've seen the change take place.

So, to really get the glory of... as if it was like so intentional is... It's not exactly accurate. And I know that the school now is standing, much like many institutions, which I check out who are white, I mean, from management or the board level or director level. But are relying on these black funds and black support, they need to look right, and they do look right, and especially overseas. I mean, it's the African music that are making the choirs, not your Mozart's and everything. But if you're in business, you know where it is.

But to claim this transformation is a little, "Yeah, okay, fine," but we are where we are. So, and I guess it's all good, but I'm not exactly sure... The running of the school and what it consists of now, I think the chairperson might be black now, or whatever, but, I personally am still... for, maybe not right now. And the thing is years like run, they fly past so, so much that... so fast that... I will say like, "Not so long ago," but we know it was like 10 years ago. But I find that for me for a while it felt like that... What can I call like that? You know, this place that was like safe for people that didn't want to exactly transform, it's away from everything. You know, what I'm saying? And the Afrikaans people are holding on to that little thing of theirs. They don't have... They're not under the pressure of everything else, you know. So yeah, but I mean, when you... it's something I am proud of when I look at the school now, I went to watch their concert at the Johannesburg theatre a couple of months ago. And I proudly say that Jeez, I was the only black boy here and I almost left and my father was on his dying bed then, said you cannot leave because then your brother needs to go there. And little did I know

that it meant other black boys need to go there. When I look at the demographics now of the choir. It's amazing. Yeah, in a nutshell. [laugh]

12:30 Speaker 2: Wow, Zwai, that is such great information. Thank you so much for that. In speaking I think you kind of like touched or answered some further questions, but I'm going to read it anyway. Because maybe there's something-

12:43 Speaker 1: That's what I normally do, apparently. [laugh]

12:46 Speaker 2: [laugh] Maybe there's something else you want to add. So, the second question is, what was your initial experience entering Drakies? What can you remember from the beginning of entering Drakies?

13:00 Speaker 1: Well, you mean, when I arrived there? When I arrived at the school? Well, one of the stories I like to talk about and I think it's quite significant, actually, because I've grown to be a person that's against othering. So I know that it's really fears of anything that is different. It's not necessarily black, I see even black people having the same attitude to people from other African countries. [chuckle] It's the same bias, "You can't call that racism". Yes, white people say "Yeah, but that's reversed racism." It's like, "Bullshit, man, there's no such thing." Because racism is enforced by the systems that be, the power that be, that support this kind of behavior. So, let's get past that.

So, back to that first day, me arriving there, much anxiety from a lot of the school arriving for the first time, and everybody has started already. But I'm a person that enjoys people and I just find it fascinating just how differently people think. But a person that was excited to see me was a fellow contestant in the Golden Voice competition the previous year, who had also joined the school that year. His name is Nicholas Nicolaides, and a white dwarf guy, I say that confidently because if you call him a midget, he's like "I'm not a midget, I'm a dwarf." It's like, "Oh, okay." [laugh] So, he was excited to see me and he was helping me, "Come let me show you everywhere." And one of those first few days he said to me, "You know what.." He says, "You know what Zwai, don't worry if they tease you or they horrible to you because you black and I get the same thing because I'm small." And that was like a big lightbulb moment for me.

It said people will just treat you differently, because you are just different, generally. So, it's not a black thing, this is a human thing.

It's a structure thing. So that really stuck out for me from the first few days. The other stuff really, I don't care to worry, because it really didn't matter. It was a matter of a few weeks after having showered with me as well and see, "Oh, that myth that black boys are like... Oh, it's actually not really true. It's like yeah bru." [laugh] I remember when I first hurt myself and blood came out, I remember this other boy in my class, like, "Oh, your blood is red." That's something I thought was really funny. So, I mean from that experience.

Otherwise, I was looking so forward to the whole music experience. I was like in heaven man, and nothing else mattered. Everything was connecting with me because I had come from a musical background. And to an extent that I was even a choir conductor at the age of 10. So, I worked with music, but I didn't have this music notation, this... What we call music notation... The sticks things, the stick-looking things, and the treble clefs. I was working with Tonic sol-fa, which was like, amazing for me, and for my sight reading. And for my, I mean, I've always just been like, at the top of it, because I had that background. So yes, like, "Yeah, whatever you can say, but come, let's go on stage bru, or let's go in front of the piano, whatever." So, for me, there was more, definitely more positives than negatives. In terms of my personal growth.

16:51 Speaker 2: Great, thank you. So, I've actually shifted some questions around as you were speaking, because you've touched on stuff as well. And I think you spoke about ... did experience change over time. Is that true? Like, do you feel you were more accepted?

17:18 Speaker 1: Yeah, I mean, like it was... When I say it was really their choice. I mean, it just happened. And I'm glad... I'm really... In a way, I'm glad that I caught the guys at their early stages of their lives with the honesty and with the innocence and at least then I could really see through what is real, as opposed to figuring things out over time. So when the one boy, for instance, was like... Well me, I didn't do that... I didn't mind to fight now. I wasn't scared of these boys, I'll neek you now. [chuckle] All I knew is that the whole school can't exactly come up on top of me, bottom line. And I have a point if we have to get down to talking about it. But anyway, I remember this one instance, during one of the small tea breaks, and this boy, whatever, we were having an argument, whatever it was, or he was pissed off at me. And then he calls me the K word... But I appreciated that he could... into finding something that can... he feels will get to me, will offend me and that's as far as he could go.

And so, it's like, "Oh, okay, is that it?" [chuckle] So, really the experiences were, were the experiences, and it just... then there are the talks that... I'm talking about maybe now it really is a few months, but maybe back then it felt like a longish time. But it wasn't that long. And I know that narrative of like, "Yeah jeez, you're not like the other blacks." And "The other blacks that steal." And whara whara whara whara whara... So I was used to that. Yeah so, I guess it was those kinds of experiences, and really just changed over time. At first, I was like, "Yoh, it's the Afrikaans guys that are more racist than..." And now that I've learned so much about racism, and it's something that I've taken a keen interest on, just social sciences in general, I've learned that it wasn't just the Afrikaans guys. The liberals or whatever they used to call themselves and just the understanding... I didn't have the terms back then. But I knew what white privilege was. So, when we have an argument and I tell them like in class, "Boet" Imagine, I'm the only black boy there I'm like, "Yeah, you fucking white." [chuckle] Yeah, whara whara whara... And then one of the English guys, "English" in inverted commas is like, "Yeah, but not all of us are like that."

And I would feel like, "Yeah, but dude, you're benefiting from everything that white people are getting at the end of the day." But will you stand up for black people? So white supremacy, white privilege, the works, that I never quite had the words for then, but I understood. And you see, boet, it would be like, even if we go on tour... You were at Drakies, right? Yeah, and even if you go on tour, and you know when you arrive at a school and you see them trying to host kids around, like, "Yeah, okay, so and so you going with 'Mrs. Nana'" And I remember a few times like nobody wanted to take me. [chuckle]

And you have to take that nap in the afternoon, and maybe whatever said, be in the bus with Ndodeni [the bus driver] or whatever. And then boys bring me like some sandwiches before the show, you know what I'm saying? Just like, "Cool, but boet, I've got most of the solos in that show." From the first flippen mass or whatever, mass by Haydn, and there I am... And boet, at the end of the show everyone, "Wil jy nie saam met ons kom bly nie?" All the tannies and I'm lagging [laughing] inside. I'm like, "Yeah, right, I know how you function." So, yeah, it's a shame but I'm a solutions guy. I have learned a lot and I've learned how white audiences react and I've worked a lot in those spaces because of my experiences, and just how they... And knowing my audiences and just the consumer behavior in general.

22:13 Speaker 2: Thank you. Great. You've touched on a few things that I was going to ask. So for example, you spoke about tours. The question I wanted to ask you, how did the country's political climate influence the school regarding tours? Because I remember even in 2001 when I was there, we went to the small town Ermelo and they wouldn't-

22:35 Speaker 1: Yes.

22:36 Speaker 2: They wouldn't host the black kids, even in 2001.

22:41 Speaker 1: Ah, flip dude, 2001.

[chuckle]

22:43 Speaker 1: 2000 and flippen one.

22:44 Speaker 2: One.

22:45 Speaker 1: Can you believe that shit?

22:47 Speaker 2: And you touched on the tours. So if there's anything else you want to add... Is there anything else you want to add about tours?

22:59 Speaker 1: It was a bit of a difficult one. There's stuff that has affected me personally, from those experiences. Really it had nothing much to do with the school, it's just what the circumstances were. And now that... I don't know, a lot of stuff is making sense only now and I'm close to 50 bru. It's like, "Jeez, this actually comes from that experience." Because having to stay in people's homes and I was living on secondhand clothing, I didn't have toiletries, I wouldn't get haircuts, like other boys because there was no one who took care of black hair and worse more so when my brother joined because I was kind of like looking after him as well.

And just how ashamed and small I'd feel. I hated just staying at people's homes like, you have to behave a certain way. And like I would just be like, "Flip, it's better just not to get out the room." Because I don't know what I'm gonna do with myself when I'm being hosted. And I remember some really pleasant experiences from those tours. And meanwhile, I've stayed at... In Houghton, bru, in the 80s, I've lived this flippen life, and then you made to feel small by people who generally are way small. [chuckle] But that is the narrative and you just have to live with it. So, having to adjust to these different environments, these different societies, throughout

my life, I became so flippen good at it, that I think it took me a while to actually be me. I was always adjusting to situations.

And it really took me until I was around 40 to actually understand, "Oh shit, this is me and this is what..." That's when I went through the divorce and everything because I was like, coming to be myself. And really, but for me those experiences, I'm kinda like, in a way pleased that they happened to me as a person who comprehends shit. And I go through stuff in my head and work things out as opposed to someone else maybe who just felt ashamed or sorry for themselves. In this way, I can really help a lot of others. The tours, international tours. Whenever I'd go overseas, and I've been that person... Whatever I experience, whatever I see, whatever, I'll always want to share it with my people, because I know, "Yoh, my people have never seen such a thing."

I remember when we went to Taiwan, the Far East in 1990. And we doing all these temples, Buddhist temples, and that whole culture of that place and all these things that are... What do they call them? Ancient. And ancient civilization and I remember the teachers and parents would join us on some of these tours. And I remember going into these temples, everyone takes off their shoes, and they seeing all this stuff, and they like, "Oh, wow, this is phenomenal. This goes back 1000's of years..." And I'm thinking on some of these things, but we got this shit back home, man." [chuckle] "We got this shit." Black people have got this shit... But it was not seen as... In that way. Instead, we were feeling ashamed of who we were because of the West and the influence. And here they are adoring all this stuff that is the same as what we have back home.

So those kinds of experiences really opened up for me that what you know, is not all there is to know and what you know... Yeah, what you know, is not just it, until you travel. So really the travels really opened up a lot for me about what I'm about, what the world is about, and constructs. And if you grew up, thinking that, knowing for sure... Or just not even having to know but just it's what it is... What it is. Jesus is Lord. There are countries where Jesus is not Lord, like an entire country. [laughing] So that stuff. As obvious as that. It's like hectic as God. And I'll be forever appreciative for that. I've been around in the active industry. That by now I can look at my experience like, jeez, which goes back to my early, early, early teens, that I've probably got a lot more to offer than most South Africans, black, white, whatever, and then most people living in the world. And that has given me a new oomph in life that I've got so much more to offer.

28:13 Speaker 2: You touched on international tours. I actually have a question; how did the international community receive the choir or receive the change at the school? If they knew the change was going on? Yeah, so how did the international community receive the Drakensberg Boys Choir?

28:34 Speaker 1: Well, I mean, I can obviously only talk for the time I was there. We used to see pictures of the Pope and so on from 1983 and so on. But when I was there, dude, obviously it would be the African music that would be very popular. And Bunny, what a smart man, what a man. Like really, Bunny would... He knew what was working... Even the year before I joined the choir. They had gone to a tour of Portugal. And so, some of that repertoire, they were still doing in the following year. And it was folk songs, Portuguese folk songs.

So, for me, so wherever we went, there would be the folk songs of that country and also the National Anthem of the country. I mean, flippen sang all the National Anthems, even flippen Taiwanese National Anthem. And the international audiences really loved that stuff. So, which comes to show again, my earlier point is people are good with what they familiar with. And we just completed an incredibly successful reality show called The Bala Family show, on M-net, and what one thing that people are saying that is most common is their relatability, how they relate to it.

So, Afrikaans people, I love them for that. They're the same as Zulus... It's "Praat, ek hoor nie. Jy moet Afrikaans praat. [Speak I can't hear you. You must speak Afrikaans]" [laughing] Not having to speak another language that would make you look better to someone else. Whereas we are still suffering from that. I call them bruises, apartheid bruises, we're still suffering from. It may take a generation or two for us to really be just us without having to satisfy anything else.

But otherwise, the choir was always well received. As far as I remember, when I was with the choir, we even did a tour of Greece the following year. And it was fantastic. And there are these communities and friends of the choir that ultimately even organize some of these concerts because they believe... For being from those communities, they, know what will work. And met some incredible people around the world. And some obviously, I've lost touch with but it's... Overall, in terms of my experience, it's been, it was absolutely amazing and eye-opening. And I think, for the boys too, even those, many of those... The many of those that never turned out to be professional musicians. Still, the school in general, had a lot... It contributed a lot to their character and what they do with their lives in general.

31:38 Speaker 2: You've actually just touched on the next question I want to ask. How has Drakies... How has DBCS influenced your career? If it has.

31:49 Speaker 1: Oh, immensely. My DBCS has influenced my career in a big way. Look, I was... I'm a person that yes, I didn't love to study, but I like to learn, especially personal growth. And so, Bunny Ashley Botha was a well of knowledge for me. Not just in musical terms, but he applied methods and systems in order to get a particular result. And I was also intrigued by the systems that he applied in achieving. So I've produced and worked on records that are records, that have never been broken in the history of South African music and what would be called a rap as a performance. I would even produce the actual vocals, whereas now a producer... A hip hop producer would be like, "The guy that makes the beats."

But I would apply all that I learned from Bunny in even directing to get the best out of what you can out of the person that's behind the microphone. I've seen it work or rather I've applied it even when I was in St. Stithians College, which was completely a Rugby School until I got there. And I got rugby players not only to sing in tune but to sing in harmony. And what I came with... My being there saw the start of jazz bands and little groups, and like culture being such a strong thing at the school because I was flippen playing the organ in the chapel, taking choir, starting all sorts of groups. And when I think back even to the school I was at before going to the Drakensberg that actually these people, these places, these institutions didn't actually have... Weren't really represented in music as much as they did when I got there. And that really is an honor and Drakensberg... People would say... When someone says, "Oh, that Zwai is so talented." "Yeah, because he went to Drakies." No, it's not because I went to Drakies.

It's a combination of all those things. And Drakies really had just added so much to what I had already. And it was just a... Really a divine process to what I have today. And it's just did so much for what I know and just how I think and not... And I'm very clear that not every boy would have gotten what I got from there. So when parents send their children there today, wanting them to turn out like Zwai Bala. I cannot promise you that because it goes way beyond being musical. It goes to how you think as well, and how you view things. It may not be a Bunny, but you can learn from anybody and see how things function and how humans function. So yeah, all in all, it's helped me immensely in my professional career.

- 35:21 Speaker 2: Right, thank you. Well, just to... Just some wrap-up questions. Thank you so much for all of that information. Getting-
- 35:32 Speaker 1: I feel like I'm on CNN.
- 35:33 Speaker 2: [laugh] Just... So the question that's the crux of this research that I'm doing. In your opinion, did DBCS have a role in nation-building? If so, what was their role? And how significant was the role?
- 35:59 Speaker 1: Again, did they have a role in nation-building? Again, they may have had a huge role in nation-building, again, by fluke. No one there necessarily was conscious and intentional about transformation and nation-building. You cannot build a nation, especially... When we're talking nation. Yes, we are talking about flippen black people, whether you like it or not. And you can't not be black and know what's good for black people. So, I think it was a pleasant surprise that something can be so beautiful which was not in the founder's vision.

Yes, there were cute little... Remember when we used to tour, and the parents are like... Host parents are like, "Oh, that little cute one there with the red hair. Aww, cute... Aww, that little blonde one." But when you stick black boys there, it's like, "Ah, man." So again, it's by fluke. And I think it is a good thing. It's a good thing for everybody. It's a good thing for everybody to experience and be part of. I mean, what I have gotten and achieved or was blessed with in terms of experience was not all my own thinking and intention. So, it goes for everyone, including myself. But it is beautiful when it dawns on me. We all had an awakening moment at some point. I'd like to believe that the school as well had that. And so, it brought about just, "Wow, how great is this?" I mean, dude when watch those kids now, when they go into that flippen... Now it's a whole... First half is all singing choir stuff, but the whole second half is African music. And now it's like, choreographed. Everything is just like, "Wow." And if I say, "Wow." I mean, "Wow."

And it's a beautiful thing, because maybe how I'd look at it is more of a discovery on ourselves, like, "Wow, we actually look good." And I bless that. I really have no qualms, and I'd just like to be real before we take any cred or props for anything. Apartheid was... It messed up, all of us, all of us. All of us are victims of apartheid. And as long as we are all waking up together, and the enemy is disunity amongst ourselves, and hopefully, at one point it will not be on the color of the skin, but on differing ideas and what it is that we all want for all South Africans.

But there's a lot that is not in our hands. That I don't believe that there were... Me as the activist that I am, I don't believe that there was proper change. And I, a firm believer, that for things to change, things must change. But there's still a lot of comfort for the previously privileged not even comfort, they still have it all. They still hanging on to everything that was stolen from everyone else. And we are judged and looked at based on class and level or position that we in right now, but which is not by default, it's by design. Until we look at it really and be honest about everything but there's fear. But I've seen fear through all these phases.

I remember I was about to release my... I recorded my album in 1993, due for release in that same year, but... And then 1994 came, but the record company is like, "Hey we're not sure. Everything was waiting for the elections." Because they didn't know, so everything was on hold. So, I've seen the fear, I've seen the fear, especially in white people. And there was also that period when there was the exit... It was white people going to Australia, and some going to London, they were just fleeing, not knowing what was going to happen. And what does that say? What do you leave us with? And no one ever felt that when they were having the privileges, like, "Eish, where can you guys run to?"

And I think it comes down to... It boils down to self. It boils down to yourself, not an organization you belong to, or a particular movement that you are part of, it boils down to self and what's been left out a lot is family, which is what I'm focusing on now. That's where it starts. And unfortunately, this constitution that is hailed as the best constitution is not African in any way. And that's why it cannot be the... Maybe the best constitution, by whoever else's standards, but not by our standards. And South Africa is not only a... But it's so dynamic. There's so much... There's so many dynamics, and we can't even maximize on that until we deal with issues properly.

There's the colored question. There's that racism question, which we were always reactive on, but there's no proactive agenda. And I'm a firm believer that don't give a shit who the president is. But for as long as they don't have an African agenda, stuff them, it's gonna be the same shit over and over again. So yeah, we may be in this for a long haul still, or it may still need to go down some more for us to really stand up, but no one else is gonna stand up for us unless it's ourselves.

42:43 Speaker 2: Thanks, Zwai. Two more questions really left. What role does DBCS presently play in nation-building, if you think they do have a role?

42:58 Speaker 1: In the same way that it played, in my case, DBCS has a big role to play. I get parents today who write to me or reach out to me and say, "Hey, man, my child really wants to go to the choir, we have an issue with funds," which is the most common issue amongst parents that want to send their boys but they see what they see on stage, it all comes from what they see. And obviously, then the school is sold to them in terms of what kind of an environment it is, and they see harmony, they see true harmony, and that on its own, the experience that the boys have there, at some point in some way it brings about a level of comfort around coexisting with others, and not only coexisting but creating magic together for all of us.

So, in that sense, if they knew what nation-building was about, I think there's a lot that they could maximize on which is just there. They don't have to spend money on... But you need people with the right ideas, even if we outsource these ideas, but you need someone with that vision first to drive those ideas. Personally, I feel that if they reached out to a person like myself, I might say, "I feel like I'm too much of a star." And the Director of Music, yes he's a friend of mine, maybe he's got better reach, but yes. And they believe in the importance of the Alumni Program, the Old Boys Association, but I think they could do a little more in really having these kinds of interviews with old boys.

These kinds that go to it, and deal with it and see... Just to check even, "Are we on the right track? And is there hope with how things are going?" Because they will be the first to admit that the school needs the old boys on the driving end, as part of the driving force. And I mean, I don't know, by now you can tell that I'm passionate about that shit. I'm passionate about progressiveness. And, yeah, maybe they could utilize, and I mean, for me, it's even beyond just my years, I still had my younger brother, who finished off. So, I was very much part of the school as a parent, so to speak, as well as Phelo, who's the baby brother, who was born the year I was in standard seven or grade nine. And he caught up so... I was still... And thank God Bunny was still there when he was there.

So, I have a good sense. I can see through the bullshit. [laugh] And from a professional level as well. And I know tradition, having also gone to complete school at a traditional institution like St. Stithians College. So, I understand that stuff. So yeah, there is still some ground to be covered to really realize... To be an active force of

nation-building. And speak openly and deal with what's being spoken around dinner tables, but it's still sensitive... Some things are still sensitive for some people because those that are in charge cannot just talk openly about those things, because... Then who do we get that can talk about those things openly? I hope I've answered you.

47:04 Speaker 2: Oh yeah, great. I think that concludes the interview. Is there any other thing? Anything else that you'd like to add?

47:21 Speaker 1: Not much, man. I think that that school could really be the gem of Africa. Forget South Africa and be one of the very iconic places. There is issues, like I said to you, as a country we have not dealt with flippen glaring, glaring issues in front of us. And the school also represents some of that, in even the question of homosexuality or whatever, that we know, is in the narrative out there somewhere. But we don't talk about... Especially now that it's a free country, but we need to talk about these things.

I had disagreements with Bunny even after I'd left the school that I believe that the school... Not that it plays a role, but it contributes to why some boys may turn out... Whether there's something wrong with it or not. But we need to think about and give proper attention to the fact that boys are there during the adolescent years, puberty stage and I mean, dude... And just deal with the stuff that needs to be dealt with. Otherwise, you always gonna be reactive and you don't know how it will come back next time. How you dealt with someone that was practicing something is different to how you deal with anything that comes up going forward. And that's just really just one of the issues. Just to allay the fears like I've said in the interview that fear is a major issue with society at large. We all want to feel welcomed, we all want to be comfortable with whatever we may come across. And we all want to know that we all kicking the ball in the same direction. Yeah, no. Yeah.

49:40 Speaker 2: Zwai, thank you so much. This has been so much great nuggets of information.

Niekie Interview

Tue, Oct 17, 2023, 12:04 PM • 39:29

- 00:00 Speaker 1: So, Hi Niekie Van Der Walt.
- 00:06 Speaker 2: Yes. Marshall-
- 00:07 Speaker 1: How are you doing today?
- 00:10 Speaker 2: Ah, no, everything is going well. It's sunny in South Africa, so, I feel good.
- 00:16 Speaker 1: Fantastic. I miss that. I miss the warmth, you know, and the language and the people and the culture. Niekie, I'm gonna- Sorry-
- 00:27 Speaker 2: This is being recorded?
- 00:29 Speaker 1: Yes, is that okay?
- 00:31 Speaker 2: Yeah, that's fine. So, I just want to tell the people that's listening. It's the best country...In South Africa, where all the sun is.
- 00:39 Speaker 1: Fantastic. I love that. It is the best country in the world, I think... So-
- 00:45 Speaker 2: Oh, good. That's all jokes aside, that's fine.
- 00:47 Speaker 1: Great. Great. So Niekie, I'm gonna read the purpose statement, then I'm just gonna ask you a few questions before we start with the interview questions. Firstly, Do I have your permission to record this and use this in my... Use the words that you speak in my dissertation?
- 01:05 Speaker 2: Yes, you're welcome.
- 01:09 Speaker 1: Great. Thank you. So, I'm gonna read you the purpose statement. The study aims to research DBCS which is the Drakensberg Boys Choir School's role in nation-building, towards the end of apartheid and the first democratic election in 1994. But I've recently discovered that when the Drakensberg Boys Choir sang for Nelson Mandela, on top... Is it Cathkin Peak or Champagne Castle? I think it was 1996. Am I correct?
- 01:39 Speaker 2: No, it was '95-

- 01:41 Speaker 1: '95. Okay.
- 01:44 Speaker 2: It was... I think it was April '95 on Champagne Castle.
- 01:52 Speaker 1: Great. April '95 Champagne Castle. Got that. Thank you so much.
- 01:58 Speaker 2: -Month but it was definitely '95.
- 02:01 Speaker 1: Cool. Awesome. Great. So, before we start with the interview questions, I just want to let you know that these questions are open-ended because I'm doing a narrative, qualitative research. So, I want to hear your personal accounts and your experience. And for the record, could you please state your full name?
- 02:28 Speaker 2: Nicolaas Jacobus Van Der Walt. Yeah, Nicolaas, N-I-C-O-L-A-A-S, J-A-C-O-B-U-S, Van Der Walt.
- 02:41 Speaker 1: Perfect. Thank you. And when did you attend the Drakensberg Boys Choir?
- 02:47 Speaker 2: 1994 and 1995.
- 02:52 Speaker 1: Great. Thank you so much.
- 02:55 Speaker 2: Right in the middle, between the end of apartheid and the beginning.
- 02:58 Speaker 1: Yeah, that's it. Yeah. Yeah. Okay, let's jump into the questions. According to media and other documented reports, DBCS became a symbol of hope for South African nation... For the South African nation towards the end of apartheid and is still considered so. One article says that DBCS is nicknamed the rainbow voices in connection to the rainbow nation, a term Desmond Tutu attributed to post-apartheid South Africa. So, the first question is, do you agree or disagree with this statement? Please explain why you agree or disagree.
- 03:39 Speaker 2: Yes, I remember the first day I arrived at the... So just for these purposes, if I refer to Drakies, it is the Drakensberg Boys Choir School. So, the first day I arrived at Drakies, I remember thinking, "Okay, there's quite a lot of black and non-white people in the school". And from coming up north in the country in South Africa, this was unusual. So, I left a school that was predominantly white. Well, I can't remember any blacks being in the school. And if I refer to blacks, it's not only black people, it's Indian and Colored or

brown people in South Africa. So, when I arrived, I saw a few non-whites in the school, and being in a school that's only 100 Boys strong... I might be corrected, but I think there was about possibly between, close to 30 Blacks in the school, and it was quite a lot for that time. And it didn't bother me because obviously the... In South African terms, we know that the black culture has got a very big, rich history of singing and especially the Zulu tribe, which is from that region where the Drakensberg Boys Choir School is situated. They've got very rich voices. And I know... It didn't bother me much, but I did... It did... What do you call it in English? Sorry for the Afrikaans word. You can perhaps help me Marshall-

05:48 Speaker 1: Yeah.

05:49 Speaker 2: It struck me that there is blacks in the school but it didn't bother me at all. So, I remember one elderly person in my family telling me, "So, Niekie, are you becoming colorblind?" And, I thought, I don't know what he means. But only when I got older, I remembered this guy asking me that. And I'm now know what he referred to, "Are you becoming colorblind now?" And at that stage, I think his age was possibly between 60 and 70. So he was right in the apartheid era and brainwashed to that extent so that he thinks that there's only one color.

So yes, I do agree with Desmond Tutu, because there... Prior to the end of Apartheid, there was... It was already transformed to a... Let me call it a colorblind school, where nobody sees color. So, it was definitely a rainbow school. And the children didn't... I mean, we slept in the same rooms, we shared the same bathrooms, which was unusual for South Africa at that stage. So yes, I definitely agree with him.

07:28 Speaker 1: Great. Thank you. Let's go to the next question. Question two: What was your experience like singing for Nelson Mandela on Champagne Castle?

07:42 Speaker 2: Yeah, well, as a small boy, there's two memories of that day. The first one is the helicopters. So obviously, [chuckle] it's a boy being 13 or 12 going to 13. These military helicopters with open doors flying up the mountain. That was quite a great experience. So yes, that's the first thing I remember of that experience. But the second one is being on that mountain with two other choirs. So, it was not only ourselves, it was the Canaries from a specific division in the military, where... I can't remember which division of the military this choir was formed... I might be corrected on that. And the second choir was, I think, the Soweto Gospel Choir if I... I think it was the

Soweto Gospel Choir. Well, I think so. But it was a black choir. And all these African-themed clothes they wore on the mountain, it struck me.

And so, we were walking on the mountain and it was quite windy, touching down there with the choppers and going to our specific place where we had to stand where all the flags were hanging. And I remember these choppers... We were right at the edge of a cliff. Well, not right at the edge, but say, a few meters from the edge of the cliff. And all these choppers just flying behind us with the new South African flag it with. Brand new South African flag at that stage and, yeah, I'm getting chills just mentioning it.

And Nelson Mandela, he sat on a small built stage with these red carpets, if I remember correctly. Red carpets or just a small built stage. And we must remember that he was also... He was not a young person at that stage. Although, he was very strong mentally. He came down after or before we sang the new National Anthem or Shosholozza... It was Shosholozza. He came down and he started to dance with us. We were doing the Shosholozza dance, and yeah... I've still got a picture of the front page of our main newspaper in South Africa called the Beeld, at that stage. And on the front page, there was a photo of Nelson Mandela dancing and doing the Shosholozza dance with us. And I was standing right in front of him in the front row, dancing this Shosholozza dance. And how proud am I? Well, it was... How long was it ago, 30 years? 30 years back. Almost 30 years back but I can still refer to that picture and say I was part of this whole new movement. Part of history. Let's call it part of history. And I did not actually... You don't know what's happening, actually, at that stage, at that age.

So, after that song, we had the privilege to stand in the queue, and to greet him by hand. And I remember, specifically remember this one thing, When I put my hands in his hand, I thought, jeez, this is a huge hand. So, it is hard, and it's huge. And that's my remembering of that day. What a great, great day, and then obviously the excitement to go down in the choppers again. But yeah, we sang Shosholozza. And I don't know... I don't think we sang the new National Anthem then because only a few months later, we had to learn the new national anthem for the World Cup, Rugby, where we did the opening. Or we did a specific draft off the new National Anthem. I can't remember. But it was a great experience. I remember that very fondly. I can share that picture if you want?

12:45 Speaker 1: Definitely. Thank you for sharing that experience too. Just listening to you, it sounds absolutely amazing. I'm so jealous that I wasn't part of the school, you know, then already. Three years too late. But yeah, thanks for sharing that. I think you have kind of answered question three, but if there's anything else... So, let me read that to you. Can you recall any memorable moments with Nelson Mandela that day or afterward?

13:19 Speaker 2: Yeah, it was like I said, it was that big hand just folding over my small hand, at that stage. And also dancing three or four meters away from me doing the whole Shosholozza jiggle. That was very memorable. Absolutely. Yes.

13:41 Speaker 1: Fantastic. So, let's go to question four. Do you recall if and how DBCS became involved in the struggle towards the end of apartheid?

13:57 Speaker 2: No, I do not know anything about that. No, not at all. Not at all.

14:06 Speaker 1: No problem. Let's go to question five. Do you recall how the country's political climate influenced the school regarding tours; local, international, and the repertoire that you sang? So what was it like for you as a boy, you know, during the political climate in '94, '95 going on tours? Can you remember how you were treated? Or how the choir was treated?

14:40 Speaker 2: Oh, that's a difficult question. Reason being that if we revert back to the first question... When I arrived there it was still apartheid... Well, not apartheid but the new... We knew that the new... That the elections was coming up. And so, it was mainstream at that stage, However, the repertoire of the school prior the new elections in '94 was already half Western, half African. So, we sang.. The first half of our repertoire was always classical music, mainly, which we know is more Western music, and then we would go for a break and put on our African attire. And the whole second half would not be conducted and there would be the African half... The second half was always African music. It was just African music, with the African attire and African moves and dance, etc.

So that did not change. It was... I think it was one of the X factors of the Drakies before the new elections that they adopted this repertoire. And I can't recall that they changed the repertoire in any way after the elections. Not at all. I think to this day, that is still one of the X factors of the Drakies, is that they do have a second half just for African music. So, whoever brought that in before my time at the Drakies, was spot on. So, I don't think that was politically

motivated in any way to do that, because I don't think the school was involved in politics at all, although they were colorblind with their repertoire, and with the children taken into the school.

So yes, I think the main challenge of the school was funding for black kids. I think that was the main challenge they had. So, we knew that we were more privileged than the black people in South Africa at that stage. And the blacks being in the school at that stage, we knew that "Okay, this person or this guy has perhaps got a sponsor". And so that's the first thought you have, "Okay, he's got a sponsor". The second thought is, "Okay, so his father or mother is now in politics, earning money". So yeah, that was just the thought of ours. But as I said, colorblind, no change in repertoire before or after. And I can't recall any clients or people where we sang... Fans... we sang... Handled me differently, no.

18:16 Speaker 1: Great, thank you. So you've actually answered a few questions. I want to skip the questions that I wanted to ask you about that. Let's go to the international community. What was your experience like with the international community towards the Drakensberg Boys Choir? How did the international community receive DBCS when you went overseas?

18:38 Speaker 2: Yeah. So, in 1995, we went to Europe. And we were privileged to meet some of the Royal family and do a private show, concert for them. We also sang in a lot of cathedrals like in St. Paul's Cathedral and went to France, Belgium, etc. So, mainly Europe, where I were involved.

So, reverting back to the previous question. In terms of the repertoire, I think the reception of the international community was mainly for repertoire-based, and not specifically, "Oh, look, there's a white and a black boy standing next to each other and singing in the same choir. I don't think that was the main thing of the audience at that stage. They were mainly in awe of the ability of these young boys singing music, music they knew because we know Europe has got a classical... Mainly a classical adopted style of music. So they were the first half... Could be perhaps the people in the audience said, "I know this piece by Mozart or Bach or Beethoven". "Oh, their interpretation of it is beautiful." So that's the first part.

But then the second half came on, the African parts, where the international community just went crazy. And I do not think, the standing ovations for the second half were in any way politically motivated, or saying, "All right, look, what these... What this choir is bringing in now and singing for us, the African music because they

have now transformed". I think the standing ovations was purely from a standpoint of, "This is great, look at this. This is great art". So yes, international community were mostly in awe about the music. Although they were very much knowledgeable of the situation in South Africa. I'm just, I think... Sorry, can I just quickly phone my wife? And there's somebody at my gate.

21:28 Speaker 1: Sure.

21:34 Speaker 2: Sorry about that. [Speaking Afrikaans]. Sorry about that.

22:07 Speaker 1: No worries, that's totally fine. So, Niekie, we're almost finished with the interview. I'm going to sort of combine questions here. Question 10: In your opinion, did Drakies have a role in nation-building? And if so, how? And how was... How significant was this role in nation-building?

22:40 Speaker 2: Before I answer that question, I just want to add to the previous question, which was very funny. In the international community, we did have some young people in Europe, specifically... Well, I say, young people, not only kids, but young... The youth, say between 15 and maybe 30 ask us, "So why are you white and coming from South Africa?" So, we thought at that stage, that's quite a dumb question to ask. "Do you not know of the whole apartheid thing? It's all over the news. Nelson Mandela being released and being elected last year. He's our new president". So, from the international community, it was our... To stress, it was more of that you've got these artists, that is singing and is only 10 or 11 years old. So, I do not think that all the people in the Western world was knowledgeable of our situation in South Africa. So, it didn't change their perception of listening to our repertoire at all.

This question you just asked from a choral... A chorister point of view, I definitely think that we were part of nation-building, but not as much as the leadership of the school or as the choral directors of the school, because obviously, we did not have any proper knowledge of what's happening behind the scenes. Maybe there were clients, I don't know... Maybe there were clients, requesting specific songs that should be dropped from their repertoire, or vice versa, that should be put into the repertoire. Because the whole structure of the Drakensberg Boys Choir School is that you've got the body corporate or the parents' organization, which is made out of parents of choristers in the school, and they basically run the school and doing the whole funding, etc. And employing actually the staff of the school. So maybe there was some pressure from... There was some pressure from the parents' organization towards

the staff of the school, which might... Had a change in repertoire songs or how we go about doing things of marketing.

So, I don't think anyone in the school besides the leadership, in grade nine, were involved in that kind of structural changes towards nation-building. However, I think the most important single event where the first, I think, say, camaraderie or nation-building came to that point was the 1995 Rugby World Cup, held in South Africa. And why I mentioned that is because we had the task of opening that World Cup. I was privileged in that choir, that the government flew us down from KwaZulu-Natal to Cape Town. And we opened that World Cup with our national anthem, which at that point, was basically a few weeks old. Nobody knew that national anthem, the "Nkosi Sikelel'". So, we only knew the "Uit die blou van onse hemel".

And we knew that we were going to get a new national anthem. And they send us drafts, they send us drafts, "Okay, this is the new one". And then after that, "No, this is the new one". And after that, "No, this is the new one. So, stick with this. You going to sing this". And we had a very strict way of learning our part of the song in the Drakensberg Boys Choir School, as you know... Well aware of. So, we got the sheet music of this new national anthem. It's a strange language. I didn't know what it means. I know "Uit die blou van onse hemel", which is our previous national anthem.

So, I... Firstly, I do not know this language... I know the language, what it is. So, it's Zulu. I know the language, but I don't the meaning of any of the lyrics. And then the second part comes where there's a small part of our old national anthem, which I knew, "Uit die blou van onse hemel". And then on that same melody, there was just a change in lyrics going to English, "Sounds the call to come together". But it's on the old melody of the old National Anthem and why I'm mentioning this is, you are confronted with this new change, which was actually the very first... What do you call it... The very first time that as a small boy, you now know that everything is about to change.

So, singing for Mandela, we have to remember Mandela was released from prison earlier than 1994. So, it wasn't new, that he's a free man. And it wasn't new that we knew that he was held in prison for the wrong reasons. So, at that stage, it was an old story. Because, if I'm correct, I think he was released 1990 or 1991. I can't remember. So that was... That's actually an old story. You know, singing for Mandela on the mountain, he's a free man for a few years now. And however, being a boy was the first time being

confronted with the new change was learning that new national anthem, where we knew that nobody else in the country knew the new national anthem.

So, we got the sheet music, and we had this process of, “learn your parts” and then you go to the voice leader of your vocal parts, say soprano one or soprano two... At that stage, I was soprano one... And you had three... You could have three attempts to sing it to this voice leader and he will listen to you and he will pass you. So, once he passes you... So, you've got his signature, you can take it to the Maestro or the choral conductor and say, “Listen, I passed my part”. And he, the choral conductor knew you know your part off by heart.

And I remember going to one of the Rugby fields with the sheet music and, “How do I pronounce this? What's this “Morena boloka”?” I didn't know what it is. So what then happened is, I had to go to one of my black friends, and said, “Listen, I know this is your language, you must help me now and I'll help you with “Uit die blou van onse hemel”. The problem is, he already knew “Uit die blou van onse hemel”. So, he didn't need my help, I only needed his help. So, then you confronted the whole time with, “Okay, so now the things is becoming to change, we have to work together”. And it's a very small point where we have to work together. But I now, for the first time in my life, I needed something from him. And it's just maybe help me interpret these lyrics. So, it was definitely part of nation-building in the sense that I was already colorblind at that stage. But not at that stage... I didn't think that I'm going to need anything from them in the future. But I definitely did.

So, and then we were flown down to Cape Town. And we do our dress rehearsal, what we call, as we go on the Rugby field, and we just see this massive stadium with empty seats where we going to sing the new national anthem. And obviously, we knew that off by heart. And we also knew that nobody in the country knew... Know this new national anthem. It was being sent around, but don't make that mistake, the rugby fans traditionally in South Africa are whites, not blacks. So, we knew the stands were mostly going to be filled by white people and they were not going to know this new national anthem.

And then we started singing this national anthem and I remember the Rugby players standing right behind us, or in the middle of us, because we were standing in a V with this big open place... Yeah, I think they were standing behind us. And we started singing this new national anthem, and we started “Nkosi sikelel” and nobody in the crowd was singing with like, “Okay”. And we were used to that. Remember, we were actually performing artists, we were singing,

the audience will never sing with us. So, we started singing, nothing strange. We started singing and the people obviously just perhaps do this, and silence because they know they've got the respect for the new national anthem, and our new flags is everywhere. And after the first part of the new national anthem, we get to the part where we started singing "Uit die blou van onse hemel", and now remember the whole audience, or all the people in the stadium, they know "Uit die blou van onse hemel", so, the moment we started singing that... I remember thinking, I cannot hear my fellow chorister and we were very attended... [speaking Afrikaans].

34:20 Speaker 1: Attentive? Maybe? Attuned.

34:24 Speaker 2: Attuned, yes. Yes, you had to be tuned to your fellow chorister next to you to listen. So that was a whole thing of being choristers, "Listen to your fellow choristers and adapt to that". So, I remember when we started singing "Uit die blou van onse hemel" I can't even hear my fellow chorister, "Where are you?". And the conductor's going crazy there... And the whole crowd is dragging in terms of tempo. So, everything was just wrong because we were swallowed by this whole loud sound of the audience, or the people in the stadium singing the old national anthem. And it's not... And we knew that it's not that they wanted to be rude or disrespectful towards the new National Anthem, it was just that they didn't know it. They didn't know that last part in English and they didn't know the first part of the black language. So, and then we got to the English part again, and the whole sound just quieted down, and we could finish the song.

And after the World Cup... So obviously followed the whole World Cup. And nobody gave us, actually a chance... We don't want to talk about rugby now. But nobody gave us a chance. And as Francois Pienaar on that stage said, "This is" ... In the documentary, I think, of Francois Pienaar, of that World Cup said, "Nelson Mandela phoned and said, "Please just win this cup for us, for the nation, for the nation building. This will be the real first step towards the nation... a new nation-building process." And yes, we miraculously won that final, and we... I remember the pictures of Nelson Mandela holding this Webb Ellis Cup and bow his head. And for the first time, you will see people in the street, blacks, whites, together, wearing the same clothes, waving the same flag. So, I don't think we had the influence of nation-building. But it was definitely part of experiencing a very dramatic nation-building process if that answers your question.

36:52 Speaker 1: Definitely. Thank you so much, Niekie, that is fantastic information. And I just love your experiences. Listening to it makes me think back on some times that I've also had. But that is such an amazing experience. I'm actually having goosebumps just by listening to you speak about that. To wrap up the interview, is there anything else you would like to add about your experience or your accounts, or anything in general?

37:23 Speaker 2: No, apart from the experiences, I was very privileged to be part of that group. I think that the only reason that people in the choir, whites and blacks, Indians and coloreds or brown people were colorblind in the school was not necessarily that there's a member of staff, all the staff that's respectful towards any culture because that was automatically there. It was because there was a common language that everyone in the school did, and it's just music. And you can... Music is the only common language that everyone understands everywhere in the world. So, I think the fact that we were all working on a common language, such as music, and a common art, form of art, such as choir, there was no reason to have friction, in terms of politically motivated skin colors. So, I think the form of art helped us transforming without knowing that you are transforming. If that makes sense.

39:06 Speaker 1: Perfect sense. Thank you so much, Niekie. Thank you for sharing your accounts and experiences. Thank you for your time. I would love to chat more to you but I'm not sure.... Is it possible to stop recording and... It's the first time I'm actually recording an interview. So, I'm just going to stop recording and see what happens quickly.

Vaughan Van Zyl

Thu, Nov 02, 2023, 10:13AM • 34:10

- 00:14: Speaker 1: Here we go. Here we go. Okay. So welcome, Vaughan, thank you so much for meeting me today.
- 00:25 Speaker 2: Thank you.
- 00:26 Speaker 1: I'm going to jump right into it. So the purpose statement is: the study aims to research Drakies' role in nation-building towards the end of apartheid and the first democratic election in 1994. However, my research has now developed towards that time when Drakies sang for Nelson Mandela, on champagne castle. So we'll talk about that as well. So some questions that I would just like to ask you before we delve into the interview questions is, **do I have your permission to use your words in this recording for my dissertation?**
- 01:08 Speaker 2: Yes, you have my permission.
- 01:10 Speaker 1: Thank you. Could you please state your full name for the record?
- 01:14 Speaker 2: My name is Vaughan Van Zyl.
- 01:18 Speaker 1: And when were you at Drakies? As a boy. As a boy.
- 01:25 Speaker 2: I was here as a boy from 1982, up to the end of 1985, when I left end of grade nine because that's... The school only goes up to grade nine. And then I was at Drakies over a period... There was a bit of an overlap from 1990 to '91, which was like nearly a year that I was a student choir master or student conductor. Then I went away, then I came back in 1993 up to the end of 1995, as an accompanist at the school, at Drakensberg Boys Choir school. And in 1996, up to 1998, I was a conductor of one of the choirs here. And then I left for a number of years and then I came back beginning of 2021. Now, being the artistic director, and then Director of Music and conductor.
- 02:22 Speaker 1: Perfect. Awesome. Great. Thank you. So we're going to start with the questions. But before we get to the questions, I'm going to read you a short passage.: "According to media and other documented reports, Drakies became a symbol of hope for the South African nation towards the end of apartheid and is still considered so. One article says that Drakies is nicknamed the rainbow voices in

connection to the rainbow nation, a term Desmond Tutu attributed to post-apartheid South Africa. So one thing I just forgot to mention is these questions will serve just as a guideline.

03:01 Speaker 2: Alright.

03:02 Speaker 1: We might find that you will answer some of the questions already or we might add some questions or leave out some questions. So the first question I have after reading that is, do you agree with this statement? And if so, why do you agree or disagree?

03:21 Speaker 2: I absolutely agree with that statement. And why I agree with it, there are a number of reasons, is that... If I can start off by saying that I think if this... Coming from the political history that we've been through in South Africa, I do believe that the Drakensberg Boys Choir would have opened its doors and opened up to people of... Boys of all races even earlier than what the school did because the first boy of color, actually joined the Drakensberg Boys Choir in 1986, which was basically the year after I left in grade nine.

So I do believe that there was always, as I say, it could have... It would have happened... It could have happened earlier if it weren't in those times. But having said that, by the time it did happen, it was... If you think of when our... When the old laws were abolished, the Apartheid laws and all of that, was a couple of years even after that. And looking at the choir today, how we had a concert yesterday, like the traditional Wednesday concerts, which you know, very well, and we had a concert on Friday as well.

And to have people walking out from all walks of life and if I say all walks of life. It means our multicolored, cultural, racial audiences that we have and people actually walking out of a concert and say things like, "This absolutely just shows the world that we've got absolute hope." because the Drakensberg Boys Choir is everything when it comes to multicultural, diverse... And I'm not now just talking about the different boys from different cultures in the choir, but the music that we do.

We try and do, and this is a thing Drakensberg Boys Choir has been so good with over all the many decades, is to expose the boys to music from different cultures, not just in South Africa, but across the world. So I do think that looking at the choir during a performance on social media, it's absolutely very, very clear that this is a picture not just for South Africa to learn from but I do believe the whole world to learn from, and it does give one hope to

see this because these boys here, they are the future leaders going forward. You on mute now I think, sorry.

06:16 Speaker 1: Sorry. Thank you. Sorry. [laughter]. Let's go to that time when you sang for Nelson Mandela, I think it was '95 on Champagne Castle. Can you tell me about that experience that you had there? And what were your memorable moments with him? How was the whole experience for you?

06:39 Speaker 2: Okay, it's a memory that I've got... It's so fresh in my mind as if though it happened yesterday. So, Nelson Mandela became the first democratic elected president in 1994, like the whole world knows. And then in 1995, we then had the first... Hosted for the first time in South Africa, the World Cup, the Rugby World Cup, which is a great year because we then won the Rugby World Cup that year. And then the celebration for the concert on top of the mountain was for our then President. And then for the 70... For our anniversary, and I think it was the 75th anniversary. I'm not very good with numbers, but it was a celebrating the... Let's call it celebrating the Air Force of South Africa's existence for many decades.

And the honor of guest was our president. And, you know, it was a task that has never been attempted, as far as I know, in South Africa, going right on top of the mountains, which you know, very, very well. The Air Force Base hosted the whole event, and we were three choirs who were involved. It was us, The Drakensberg Boys Choir, it was the Air Force, the then South African Defense Force and church choir concert group, the Canaries, and also the Imilonji KaNtu Choir, a very well-established and well-known choir from the Soweto region.

And so then we were approached and they said, let's do this event on top of the mountain. So everybody was flown up in the Air Force helicopters. We had a rehearsal the day before where we all flew up. And they even flew a piano up and a piano tuner had to go up twice. We were at the top of the mountain. And then the big event came on that day, when President Nelson Mandela was flown up, and he was the last person to arrive on top of the mountain. And just him getting out of the helicopter, there was already this huge presence like he had. And it was a memorable experience for all the boys, all the staff...

And then all the choristers from the other choirs had to do this outdoor concert but not just outdoor, but right on top of the mountain, which is windy, and all of that. And he sat on a podium with some of the then chiefs and generals in the Defense Force and

some of the cabinet ministers as well. And being the person that he was... We actually prior recorded a CD called Pride of the Nation, which was a CD... A recording that we... An album we made between the Drakensberg Boys Choir, the Imilonji Choir, The Canaries, and the then Air Force Band.

And he was presented with the first copy of that album right on top of the mountain but... And I remember very well at the end of the concert, we sang Shosholoza, which is like, I always refer to it as South Africa's second national anthem, and he actually made his way down from the podium, walking down over that rough terrain, which is at the top of the mountain right down to where the choir was to come and stand there. And standing facing the... All these three different choirs. And joining in with doing Shosholoza. So it was an absolute highlight because it's... That's one of the one-in-a-lifetime experience. And if I say one in a lifetime, it might happen again, but I don't think in my life again. And that all happened really because of Nelson Mandela.

10:34 Speaker 1: Thank you so much for sharing that Vaughan. It sounds absolutely like it was an amazing experience.

10: 39 Speaker 2: Absolutely.

10:40 Speaker 1: Could you just say that... The name of the album again?

10:47 Speaker 2: The album was called Pride of the Nation. And I know that you cannot get it. It was never an album that was really at the... Then, you know, we had all the different record shops or CD shops, which is not really a thing anymore. It was not out there for the public to purchase. I think that the main reason for that, for that album, I know that the school did sell, but we only got a, as far as I remember correctly, a certain quantity of it. So we couldn't order and order more. Because it is the copyrights, it was the copyright of the Air Force because the Air Force obviously did all of that. But it was really actually a token... I think that was... I've got one in my collection. And it's really just part of my memorabilia to have of that specific event.

11:51 Speaker 1: Fantastic. So let's move on to the country. You spoke a bit about like, you know, when you sing Wednesday or Friday concerts, and the audience comes out and says "Wow, look at this choir. There's a symbol of hope." Looking back, as an early conductor at Drakies in the '90', when you went on tour, how did the country receive the school? Keeping in mind that the school accepted boys of color and also adding like a full traditional African setlist?

12:29 Speaker 2: Are you now referring to my days as a boy here, or as a young conductor?

12:35 Speaker 1: You are very welcome to talk as your time as a boy too, I think, as well. But also as a conductor.

12:44 Speaker 2: Yes. So, if I say what we've got traditionally, which is a tradition of the last, I would say 30 years, really... No, just a little bit over 30 years, 33 years, is our second half, which is basically over the years been African music set and traditional African music program, which is music from traditional parts of South Africa. We've even had music from neighboring countries that we... Because we're all part of Africa. And the very first African sets was done in my grade nine year, which was called African music, in 1985. That's what I mean by the school was actually already for change and want to change is the fact that we then with a political situation, us as a choir, and at that time, just being, you know, as it was back then being a white group of boys singing, we did African music.

And I think that the world was ready for something fresh and something new like this, which the Drakensberg Boys... And that's something that's evolved over the years. We started it off, and then it stopped for a while, the African music program. Then when I came back as a student choir master end of 1990, and we went to Greece in 1991. I said, let's get that program out again. And let's have a look at it. And let's do it because I think it's just ready for it. Our country is ready for it and would love it and the world would love it. And then we got it out. And since then, African music has always been a part of an African music set.

Having said that, that even in the earlier years Drakies did do African music, and did do traditional African music but more as pieces on the repertoire. Like, for instance, there's one old record, a vinyl record, and I don't know exactly what year it was, but it was definitely in the 70's, which is called Bayeza, Bayeza Kusasa Bayeza, which is a Xhosa, traditional piece. So the schools always been wanting to do music of all cultures in South Africa. It wasn't just Afrikaans, English, but all the different cultures. And then the African music came in and became a tradition and it became like passing down because the school has got a tradition of also boys, passing the traditions down to the younger boys.

So the older boys like for this year, the grade nines, is going to leave at the end of the year, they've done a lot of work in passing their knowledge, and all, and especially the sort of music passing it

down. So then the '90s and I for one, look, because I've been involved with the school for 41 years. I haven't been here physically for 41 years, but I could see what happened and then there was a, you know, knew very well, a Director of Music and conductor here, Bunny Ashley Botha or Christian Mauritz Ashley Botha who for nearly 27 years, built a lot of things up that was here, including the African music program, and he had a vision. You know, he was sort of like, ahead of his time in all genres of music, not just the African music, he was just on it, you know, he was just... He could see a way forward.

So, in the '90s, then, you know, we, as it went on like that, and gumbots sequences started coming in, drums started playing bigger roles. Dancing became more refined, and more together and all of that the actual dancing. All the different African instruments like the Kalimba's, the panpipes, the Uhadi bows and the shakers, different shakers, Grass shakers, Calabash shakers, and all of that. And the world just absolutely loved this. And if you take African music now, in our auditorium on tour, the South African audiences love it, because it is ours, it doesn't belong just to the Drakensberg Boys Choir, it belongs to us as a country it belongs to... It's just like, if we do any traditional music from any other country, we know it belongs to that country. So we try and do it as respectfully as we can. And not to make it ours. But this music, and we can share it. Because at the end of the day, I think that music belongs to all of us in the whole world. And that's something we can share. It's the international language.

So the African music has evolved over the years, many things. And when I came back now, things that I could just see, "Wow." It's just.. It's on another level here, but it takes time, it takes time. So we've had up to the end of last year, or really, up to the beginning of this year, we've got two sets, we've got African music A and African music B, which is both very traditional music program. So we've alternated, but then we thought, "Let's go a little bit further this year. And let's make room," because that's traditional music and a lot of traditional music like you'll very well know, is not really notated. Because it's a generation passing it on. That's the nice thing about traditional music. And that's one of the reasons I love it so much.

But these African music programs, so it's very traditional. So there's... The only accompaniment in the program is by means of African percussion. And if I say African percussion, it's all those instruments. And solos because obviously in the traditional music, there's, I don't know what the English word is, I don't know if it's a for singer, [‘n voor sanger], so that person will [singing] and then

everybody [singing]. That's... Because that's very traditional. And then the two sets. And then what we've got this year is that we've actually got a set African music C program, which is done with...

We do it in two ways. We can do it with a full band, which we've done in the Joburg theatre, and in our auditorium. And it's also been tracked, so all the tracks. It's like... I don't like the word backtrack. But that's really what it is. So we call it just track. Because the track that's been made by our music producer and our Head of Production, Tristan Trent, and him... Actually, our choreographer coach [Jakes Zekosi] has put together this whole new concept, and I'll tell you about that just now. So the track is there. Majority, about 96% of all the track instruments that's in a concert that the choir do it with... In actuality fact, we're doing it with track at the moment. All 96% of those instruments are live. They were played in live. So it's not tracked versus MIDI and keyboard and whatever. So the live bass, live brass, live keys, all of the guitars, and so on.

The program consists of being a band, it's a more modern African program, but we have included hits in the program, we call it Afro-pop. So Afro-pop is Johnny Clegg, Miriam Makeba, Mango Groove, even "Daar kom die on the Alibama", which is from the Cape. Yeah, just to mention a few, Stimela. So we've got "Circle of life" is in there. And it's got a whole different vibe to it. So the boys don't wear traditional African music clothes, but more like the, we call it like the township vibes of the 50s, 60s. You know, the pennywhistle era, all those and the Top Hats and the dancing and it's been choreographed like that as well. And we literally have audiences up on their feet. I have not, like Joburg Theater seen an audience basically going wild, singing, dancing in the aisles for just about a whole second half. Because it's all music that people know. And we've brought it out, it's our newest album called Stimela. So that whole thing out on album.

And it's a great listening to but then obviously, it's... Visually because there's lights. And then we've also got, for this program, which we've had in the Joburg Theatre because of those huge big screens, but we have used it when we toured to Mauritius now as well. So there's back footage, film footage from trains of the earlier years and mine workers and depending on the song, and how it goes about. So it's a feel-good, great show. And the main thing about it is to say this is us as South Africa. This is us, South Africa. And the wonderful thing about the program is that we can continue with it next year but we can say, "Okay, let's park these two songs, let's bring two other ones in." Or, "Let's put these three on the side

a little bit, let's bring the other ones in." And we can tailor make it but the show is so great.

So we can do it with a full-on band, which consists out of drum kit, percussion, double bass, saxophones, piano, two keyboards, guitar, and some of these instruments are played by the boys in the concerts, and all the other players are the staff, which is also great. So for the... We are all a staff and boys on stage, but nobody conducts. So we as staff are part of the band and part of working with a show and having this great time with the boys. But then we can reduce it down to just piano accompaniment, a guitar, and some percussion, or just piano accompaniment and a drum. So we can basically anything of the program. So if there is a there's an event, a concert that we get booked for, it's only a 20-minute thing they want us to perform, we can do it with 12 Boys and still cover and do the afro-pop. And it's just a feel-good thing. And it's exactly what our nation's about. And our country's about. If you listen to and part take in this music. But what I want... My point is it started many, many years ago and it's evolved into what we do here. So there was a lot of groundwork, a lot of pioneers work that's been done by conductors, staff, and many old boys in the past. That's where it started. So it really started off in 1967 when the school opened its doors to the first 20 boys. That's where it started. And whatever we do... So it's not like really anybody specific can take all the credit for it. There's been a lot of groundwork done before my time, and that we can just take it from here and move forward and keep on with that groundwork for whatever is going to come in 10 years or 20 years time from now.

24:22 Speaker 1: Wow, thanks Vaughan. As an old boy, I think that's amazing. I am so glad that's going on. Just for the record you mentioned these three different, am I correct, there's three African music sets that you can choose from to perform. The one is or the new one is the Afro-pop-

24:44 Speaker 2: Afro-pop, yeah.

24:45 Speaker 1: And the other one is the traditional African music?

24:52 Speaker 2: Yes, the African music A and B is traditional, two separate, two different traditional music, African music programs. So in there, you will find, like, for instance, you can do a song like click song (Qongqothwane) which is traditional, but then again, it was also done by Miriam Makeba, so that song we can do it in a traditional way, or we can pull it into Afro-pop, and do it, the sort of like Sophiatown style/way that Miriam Makeba used to do it. Or

something that Hugh Masekela used to play or, you know, all these big artists, Johnny Clegg, for instance, as well, and the same as Mango Groove.

So there are certain songs which traditional, like as I said, now "Click song" which is a world-famous song, made famous by Miriam Makeba, Mamma Miriam Makeba as she's called... Like "Pata Pata", the same thing. But "Pata Pata... Look as far as my knowledge, and you might be able to help me or correct me, it's not a traditional song, as in, but... So the traditional programs... we've got the another famous one is "Thula thu, thula baba, thula sana" which is a... But that again, you can do it as an Afro-pop one with a more modern vibe to it, but we can even then we can keep it traditional. So the big difference I think, between the traditional and so on, because certain things you don't tamper with if it's traditional.

But you know, in the day we live now, I mean, we've even had, you know, people even doing stuff like sax with a bit more pop vibe with like Mozart stuff or back in the day they did the Vivaldi program with a, like electric guitar vibes... And you were here as a boy... Which is fine. It's not... As long as you don't. As long as you respect... And there are people, and there's nothing wrong with it, who will not listen to that and who don't agree with it and that's absolutely 100%.

Whatever we do, and this goes for traditional music as well, is that, as long as we don't tamper it in a way or within a way that it doesn't do justice too. But a lot of traditional music we don't know who composed it, or there's no names written on the top right. Because you know, there are maybe not copies and so on. But wherever we can. And even if we don't have a composer's name, it's still respect that traditional music. And that's the nice thing about traditional music being passed on. That's the whole idea as well here, there's no real scores for it, for some of it there is scores.

But it's like African music A., I must honestly say we haven't done a lot this year. But African music B, the current boys now will pass that whole program, carry it over to the new generation coming in next year, the new boys. So it's that passing on, and that's exactly what we do with the African music program. It gets passed on, passed on, and keeping... Just making it... With handling the music with so much respect. But in any year, that the next year and the next is to try and even do it better, and better and better. But then also the African music program is to try and have that sound of traditional, these lovely valleys that we've got where music the is passed on, or homesteads or suburbs, or wherever this music is done to make it sound...

So if you do something in a specific culture, we will try our level best to make it sound like that with pronunciation and the actual music and the actual singing. Where Afro pop now is a different thing. Obviously, again with Afro-pop, Mango groove must sound like Mango groove. We try. We obviously give it our taste because we are a boy's choir. And that's why with some of the tracks, we had the brass... The brass is done up in Joburg by a brilliant brass player. The trumpets, because he could give the feel of that exact original. And that's important is not to lose that effect and to have that feel. And it's not just a cover version. We don't... We've made it our Drakensberg Boys Choir contribution to South Africa through this Afro-pop program. But in the same thing, you can hear it's one of those big names we've been talking about, you know, legends.

29:31 Speaker 1: Wow, so much. Thank you so much. It's such rich information that you are giving me. Vaughan, we've touched on a lot of things so... And I feel you have mentioned things sort of like how music, how Drakies have done music, and how that's translated into nation-building. So I think we can conclude this interview. And is there any final thoughts on like, Drakies' role in nation-building from the past and the future that you see, or that you're hoping for?

30:12 Speaker 2: Thank you, Marshall. And it's really great for me to speak about this and I'm passionate about, because like you, we as old boys know, and I must say, we passionate about the school, we're very passionate about the school. But you don't necessarily have to be an old boy to be passionate about the school. You can be an old staff member, old parents, old patrons or audience members, or existing. Everybody, you know, you become passionate about the school. But I think the big thing here is this, this exactly is that me personally in the role that I'm in, and the position I'm in is not in... I'm not doing this for us to be, call it, the best boys choir in the world. That's not... My biggest aim is to, obviously, number one, educate our current boys. And like in our mission statement, one of the very, very, there's two very important things in our mission statement, and the one thing is to prepare boys for life. And, towards the end of the statement, it says, in a Christian environment.

So those are for me our core values. And for us to live by that because that is our primary work, then comes the training of the choir, and the singing, and the academics and all of that, but it's to teach these boys life lessons, which the schools taught me, and they've you and the wonderful staff that's been here, have taught us those things, and have equipped us for life.

And obviously, in our South Africa, our beloved South Africa, with all the things that's going on here and every country on Earth got its problems and so on, but is to carry... To keep on with the message of hope. And this, we can do this. And the whole world, the majority of the people on this whole Earth, wants it to work and want to be in peace and want to live and reach out to one another and share and all of that. So to show through what we do with our music. But then to take it even further than that, to keep on doing music from all walks of life and other parts of the world. Because I think that what we try and do is, yes, for a country, very, very important, but to show the world. So in doing all genres of music, all styles, whether it's classical, pop, African, Afro-pop, it doesn't matter. It's as I say, it's not just for our country, but basically our message we'd like to carry out across the world in showing the world that, I think, people can work together, people can learn from one another and people can benefit from one another in good positive ways.

33:24 Speaker 1: Perfect, thank you so much, Vaughan. Thank you for your time. I think that concludes the interview. Unless there's anything else you'd like to add.

33:33 Speaker 2: I would just like to thank you and say that it was a great honor and privilege to meet you, for you to interview me. And yeah, coming specifically from you. Know that I value... And what you do so so much, and I respect it. I honestly do and what you're doing is amazing and great. And this has been, really, a privilege and an honor for me and where you are now at the moment and then being an old boy of the school and yeah, what a great honor and privilege for me. So I thank you very much.

34:05 Speaker 1: Thank you. Thank you.

Clearance for study from the University of Washington Human Subjects Department



HSDInfo <hdsinfo@uw.edu>
to me ▾

Wed, Oct 4, 6:40 AM



Hello Marshall,

Thanks for checking in about this. Since you have determined that you are not conducting a systematic investigation designed to contribute to generalizable knowledge (i.e., research) then the human subjects regulations regarding consent do not apply to your activities. If you still wish to provide information to the folks you will interview, you could build from the regulatory framework. I would suggest you take a look at our guidance on exempt research. Our website provides information about [what information should be provided to subjects](#) in exempt studies. None of that would be required by our office, but you could use it to build something that makes sense for your interviews. For instance, you wouldn't need to tell them it's research, since it isn't but you might want to let them know the purpose of the interviews, provide them with your contact info in case they have questions, or tell them what you plan to do with the info they provide you and whether it will be kept confidential.

Please let us know if you have additional questions and I wish you all the best with your project.

Amanda

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