



'DIALECTIC SOUL'

Reviewed by Phethani Madzivhandila, IFAA

Asher Gamedze is a cultural worker based in Cape Town, South Africa working mainly as a musician, student, writer, organiser, and an educator.

Recorded over one and a half days in Cape Town and featuring Thembinkosi Mavimbela on bass, Buddy Wells on tenor saxophone, Robin Fassie-Kock on trumpet and Nono Nkoane on vocals, *Dialectic Soul* is also a political inspired album partially inspired by the legacies of Steve Biko, the founder of the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa; and Miriam Makeba, a beloved singer and an anti-apartheid leader who became one of the prominent voices across the continent. Gamedze already stands out ahead of his peers and contributing to the rich legacy of south African jazz that has never been afraid to speak out against social injustices and social ills.

Gamedze, originally from Johannesburg, is a Cape Town-based drummer who often appears as a sideman playing with different artists, both local and abroad. Internationally he made his mark for his seminal appearance on a song titled "Cape town" by Chicago-based clarinetist Angel Bat Dawid. Locally he has also worked with established jazz musos like Ndunduzo Makhathini amongst others and appeared as a drummer for multitalented singer-songwriter M'saki.

To some of us who were immersed on the struggle for free education we know Gamedze as an activist and an intellectual who is left leaning. He was part of the cohort in the university of cape town that was involved in the struggle for free higher education. He holds a master's degree in African Studies from the University of Cape Town, his master's thesis is titled "It's in the out sides: An investigation into the cosmological contexts of South African jazz," and traces the philosophical and spiritual practices that have informed the trajectory of South African jazz in the past century, placing South African jazz as an art-form rooted in the cosmology of African spirituality and the intellectual practices of the Black Radical Tradition.

The album kicks off with a suite titled "State of Emergence" that is divided into three movements: (i) "Thesis," (ii) "Antithesis," and (iii) "Synthesis" which invokes the Hegelian dialectic as the basis of understanding the torrid history of colonialism and slavery. The opening song sets the tone of the kind of rhythms and melancholy that Gamedze is aiming at, to evoke feelings and thoughts around jazz as a tool for liberation and contribution to the cultural resistance of jazz.

According to Gamedze, the "state of emergence suite" that makes up the first third of the album attempts to represent how colonial violence generates resistance. He believes that the "solo drums in free time symbolise autonomous African motion, moving through and resolving its own contradictions". With thesis, synthesis and antithesis he tries to paint a picture that all these contradictions will at some point come together and ooze out to cause a revolution, such that we must remain hopeful that at some day Azania will be free.

Dialectical soul is another Avant-garde contribution to the rich culture of South African jazz. Gamedze contribution comes at a turmoil time in the country facing the ramifications of the early 90s political settlement that has not radically changed the fortunes of the South African people.





In his introductory essay of the album, the radical historian Robin D.G. Kelley describes it as “the most joyful proclamation of world revolution—cooler than the Internationale.”

With this album he has already solidified himself as one of the best artists to come out of the country and continuing in the rich legacy of free jazz: learn the rules—then break them. Like the avant-garde movement in visual arts, free jazz was an attempt to break from the traditions of jazz and create something entirely new. As jazz musicians became more comfortable with improvisation, a new sound emerged: experimental, unorthodox, and rebellious. Politically it also offers an intervention to the rejection of the neo-colonial country that is South Africa and in favour of the decolonial views of a socialist Azania. In the song hope in Azania, he offers a lament of the imagined future and building hope for the future. As Asher himself says: “Dialectic Soul is about motion and a refusal to remain static or stay still. It’s the commitment to be continually moving. With this album he moves us forward to the imagined Azanian dispensation. It came as no surprise that it was awarded in the Mzantsi Best Traditional jazz album 2021.

Dialectic soul is a call to revolt, a lament for the beloved Azania and the betrayed revolution. As proud followers of this musical genre we can only hope that we will be mesmerized again in the future with even a better album from this musical genius. Siyabulela Mr Gamedze.

