

SURFACING CAPE TOWN



Fanie Jason for The New York Times

Mac McKenzie, known as the King of Goema, the name for Cape Town music, plays during a stop on a jazz tour of the city.

One Jazz Riff After Another

By GISELA WILLIAMS

FOR many safarigoers, Cape Town is just a brief stopover on their way to stalk lions. Staying just long enough to hike up Table Mountain, they decamp to Kruger National Park or other South African game reserves to get up close and personal with the Big Five.

So perhaps it was a matter of time before the safari went urban. "They say that in Cape Town, there are 20 guitar players per square kilometer and saxophonists behind every bush," said Iain Harris, a music producer and journalist.

Mr. Harris, after giving a radio interview about the rich local jazz scene, met Michael Wolf, who owns a small tour company called Andulela (27-21-790-2592; www.andulela.com).

A year ago, the two started the Cape Town Jazz Safari, a kind of expedition through the city's musical habitat. Led by Mr. Wolf and Mr. Harris, the guided tour lasts between three and four hours, offering a cheery mix of intimate recitals, backyard barbecues and jam sessions. It costs 395 rand a person, or \$56.50, at 7.3 rand to the dollar, including dinner and drinks.

The adventure begins most Monday nights at the District Six Cafe, a music hall and school where the jazz pioneer Abdullah Ibrahim teaches. (The name of the cafe refers to a fabled community of freed slaves,

artists and immigrants called District Six that was designated whites-only in 1966 and effectively destroyed.)

The performance changes weekly: one night it might be Hilton Schilder, a local keyboardist who plays solo, or Kyle Shepherd, a young pianist who pushes the boundaries of jazz.

The next stop is Bridgetown, one of Cape Town's first townships, and the modest home of Mac McKenzie, the city's reigning Goema king. Mr. Harris provides a music primer along the way: Goema, as Cape Town music is called, has its roots in indigenous Khoikhoi, a tribal blend of drums and trancelike chanting. It evolved over the decades, absorbing the sounds of American jazz, Brazilian samba and whatever culture sailed into port.

The Goema King (or Mac, as everyone calls him) will greet you at the door himself, wearing his signature white button-down shirt and jaunty beige hat. His mother (Ma Mac) cheerfully attends to the grill out back, cooking up a tasty feast of snoek, a barracuda-like fish, for her guests.

After popping open a few Black Label beers, Mac picks up his guitar and plays covers of jazz classics like Dizzy Gillespie's "Night in Tunisia," and his own compositions, but with a South African twist. The scene suggests a dorm room, with friends poking their heads in throughout the night. Mac keeps strumming during dinner, as he regales visitors with funny and heartfelt

stories about his band, the Goema Captains of Cape Town, and his dreams of opening a studio in his stamp-sized backyard.

The last stop is the township of Lansdowne, at the Capetonians Are Swingers Restaurant. The air is filled with smoke, laughter and the sweet sounds of home-grown groups like the Alvin Dyers Quartet. Although the touristy V & A Waterfront Complex can now claim places like Manenberg's Jazz Cafe, (27-21) 421-5639, they are empty of this gritty authenticity.

By midnight, after four hours of great jazz and a few drinks, the line between safarigoers and local music fans has blurred.

