

Samro scholarship alumni gain experience at Dutch jazz fest

A number of Southern African Music Rights Organisation (Samro) overseas scholarship alumni performed at the Rabobank Amersfoort Jazz Festival in The Netherlands.



Among the previous Samro scholarship alumni who have taken the Dutch city by storm in the past three years are Bokani Dyer, Linda Sikhakhane, Zoë Modiga, Mandla Mlangeni, Ntando Ngcapu, Thandi Ntuli, Benjamin Jephtha, Keenan Ahrends, and Darren English. The excursions were made possible with support from SENA, the largest collection management organisation for both performers and recording rightsholders in The Netherlands, and the Samro Foundation's partnership with the Unisa Foundation.

Taking African talent to a global stage

Trumpeter Darren English and bassist Concord Nkabinde have had the pleasure of playing at Amersfoort, thanks to the initiative of Professor Karendra Devroop of the Unisa Foundation, who invited the Samro Foundation's André le Roux and others to experience the Dutch-South African Jazz Expedition at the 2016 edition of the festival. Ten South African jazz musicians performed there and, as part of a cultural exchange, 10 of their Dutch counterparts came to play in South Africa.

Nkabinde maintains that events such as Amersfoort offer "an effective tool to place our African agenda at the global table", particularly in a climate where musicians often have to resort to playing cover versions to make a living.

He points out: "International opportunities and platforms such as these have been decreasing with the prevailing global economic meltdown. So, to be presented with not only an opportunity to perform internationally but to perform South African music – and perform your own compositions – is something that is welcomed and of importance in growing one's craft in a global space."

Invaluable experiences

Bokani Dyer, who won the Samro jazz scholarship for keyboard players in 2013 and played at the festival in 2017 agrees: “The experience was positive and enriching. Our collaboration was organic and I enjoyed sharing music with our friends from Europe. The festival and small town of Amersfoort offer a special experience that is easy to enjoy.”

Dyer, 2015 Samro scholarship winner Zoë Modiga, and 2016 winner Linda Sikhakhane were invited to the Dutch town to help launch the Amersfoort International Jazz Laureates Festival. Modiga recalls: “Sharing the stage with fellow scholars was legendary. Being away from home made for an unfamiliar but moving experience. I learnt a lot that I still use within my own musical journey today.”

Sikhakhane believes the festival is an ideal way to build a global network and grow as a musician. “To get an opportunity to share music with fellow improvisers is always a pleasure, an opportunity to learn and execute positive vibrations through song,” he says.

“What excited me the most is to exchange culture through music with musicians that we have never played with before; there was enough room for improvisation with a collective idea of presenting something beautiful to the audience.”

At this year’s festival, 2017 Samro scholarship winner Ntando Ngcapu and English hooked up with the 2018 and 2017 Standard Bank Young Artist winners for jazz, pianist Thandi Ntuli and bassist Benjamin Jephta, as well as guitarist Keenan Ahrends to form the All-Star South Africa Band as part of the Laureates Festival.

Nkabinde has the final word on the value of exposing South African jazz talent on international platforms such as Amersfoort: “I feel that this initiative can only benefit our South African jazz sector at so many different levels. Obviously, the interaction is not only at a musicians’ level but also an interaction between festivals and music institutions. I trust that this initiative will keep growing, affording more South African musicians similar sustainable opportunities.”

For more information, visit www.samrofoundation.org.za.