

April 29th, 2021

Jazz World Trio celebrates International Jazz Day with concert and conversation



Colette Greenstein



Jazz pianist Witness Matlou knows the power that music has to effect social change. It changed his life and has given him the opportunity to give back to his community while traveling the world performing and teaching.

The Johannesburg native's early exposure and understanding of the power of music was through the role that South African musicians played in the struggle against apartheid, Matlou tells the Banner in a recent telephone conversation. "The music was used to kind of really communicate a message at large," he says.

Matlou also cites how Miriam Makeba and Hugh Masekela, while exiled in the U.S. during that period, used their music as "a platform to talk about the struggle, to bring awareness of what was going on in South Africa."

The composer, performer and bandleader whose work is influenced by African traditional, folk music, jazz and classical, is slated to perform with his band, the Jazz World Trio, on Friday at 8 p.m. at [JazzNOW: No Borders](#). The Jazz World Trio comprises Argentinean drummer, composer and educator Guillermo Nojehowicz; internationally-renowned Swedish bassist Bruno Råberg; and Matlou. All three musicians are affiliated with Berklee College of Music. The live virtual performance on April 30 is a production of Boston public media producer GBH and JazzBoston, and will be streamed from the GBH Fraser Performance Studio. The concert is a celebration of International Jazz Day. Eric Jackson, the long-time host of the radio program "Eric in the Evening," will hold a conversation with the musicians following the performance. The concert and conversation are free, but event pre-registration is required.

Matlou grew up in the township of Tembisa. He says church, specifically the junior choir, was where he began his musical education. But it was during his high school years that the budding musician fell in love with jazz music while hanging out after school at the Moses Molelekwa Community Centre. His mentor Jerry Molelekwa, affectionately called “Bra Monk” because of his love for Thelonious Monk, introduced Matlou to jazz and gave him a CD every week to listen to, which inspired his aspirations to one day perform professionally.

It wasn't long before Boston's Berklee College of Music came calling. Matlou received a full scholarship to study music and graduated in 2015 with a bachelor's degree in performance, jazz compositions and a minor in philosophy. He then earned a master's in 2016 from the Berklee Global Jazz Institute, where he studied with Grammy Award-winning musicians Danilo Pérez and Terri Lyne Carrington. After receiving his master's degree, he was awarded a post-master's fellowship in 2017 at the Berklee Global Jazz Institute.

Matlou has toured professionally throughout Europe, Africa, Latin America and the United States and has performed at numerous music festivals, including the Panama Jazz Festival, the Monterey Jazz Festival, and the Newport Jazz Festival, as well as at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. and at Dizzy's Jazz Club in Lincoln Center in New York City.

Currently a fellow at the Harvard University Center for African Studies, Matlou hasn't forgotten his roots and how music has enriched his life. He has given back to the local community through teaching music to youth at several Massachusetts-based organizations, including All Dorchester Sports and Leadership, the Moses Youth Center in Cambridge, and the Hamilton-Garrett Music and Arts Academy in Roxbury. He has also worked with the Tony Williams Dance Company as a composer and musical director on the company's “Urban Nutcracker.”