

***'Pointless Breakfasts' at Belem,
Kensington, Johannesburg: Michael
Blake interviews Paul Hanmer, 5 May
2005***

MB: Tell me about 'Beautiful African Music' [CD Water & Lights, Sheer Sound SSCD103, 2004, Track 9]

PH: It came out of a different era in my life; in my personal life things were very different in 1999 to what had happened before. The impetus for making that piece of music came from 'outside' in the sense that I was shown various edits of this movie [on] the Himba people shot in location in Namibia, which dealt with elephants. And something about the groove of that song came from an idea of elephants walking. There was the recording as well, which was done by a beautiful engineer, Fernando Perdigao [who recorded this piece much earlier than the rest of the album, recorded by Peter Pearlson]. They both trained from 16 or 17 years of age under Peter Thwaites.

MB: So everything about that piece is different?

PH: The rest is Peter Pearlson [recorded digitally] and this one is recorded onto 24 track magnetic tape, which gives it a warmth also; and the drums that Barry van Zyl plays – the way they're recorded – is really open, 'breathing', you know? Also I had various instructions in the scores for the singers, Khanya Ceza and Cecil Mitchell, and they're more to do with breathing and stopping and method of attack. So more effects, with certain pitches of course ... I was trying to say something in a way without writing lyrics.

MB: I think it works brilliantly. And that piece feels like it had to have voices.

PH: Yes. It obviously doesn't form part of other work that's on the CD, in terms of time and the purpose of the recording. Most of the other tracks come from 2003, December, and February 2004; and this piece comes from the middle of 1999.

MB: In fact it's the only piece from the last century.

PH: Yes, that's true. But Damon Forbes [MD, Sheer Sound] spoke up for it because of the voices, and he probably thought it had something special, too. I think every album consists of work made specifically for it, not going back to grab other pieces. I suppose it's a bit anal, hey? And yet it's your favourite piece on the album.

MB: Has it taken a direction beyond the piece itself?

PH: Yes it has. It forms the basis of a piece on Gloria Bosman's first album [*Tranquillity*, SSCD 052], which I produced and made a compositional contribution towards, which also dates from 1999. She heard that piece and liked it, so she wrote words to it, and I got Louis Mhlanga and his brother-in-law Jimmy Indi, who's the bass player that he works with. With the late Jethro Shasha they had a band called Musik ye Afrika. So Louis and Jimmy translated the words that Gloria had written into Shona, and this song became 'Mazwi Angu [Track 7]. But she liked the structure of 'Beautiful African Music' as a basis on which to work.

MB: The string quartet which was recently completed and which is a very substantial work: is this also a new departure? I guess it follows on from your piece for the Bow Project to some extent. But I'm wondering if writing music for other people to play entirely, and writing it out in absolutely detailed notation, if this is also heading somewhere?

PH: Well, certainly. It started very long ago, because I remember that one of the first trips my parents took abroad in the early '70s, my father brought back a pen with 5 nibs with which one could draw a set of music lines.

MB: From where?

PH: I think he bought it in Italy. [Laughs] And I remember getting double elephant size paper from my cousin Sidney, who was trained as an architect. This paper was used as a backing sheet on which to make architectural drawings. And I used to draw these lines in my teens, and take my sketches for string quartet to the teacher of my sister Arlene. Her music teacher Johann was also a harpsichordist.

MB: It sounds like your string quartet goes back a long way.

PH: That's what I'm trying to say. I never finished any of them. I used to listen to a lot of Bach. I was totally crazy about Bach.

MB: Is that what they were like?

PH: They probably were, because I found it easier to hear strings and then listen to loads of Bach and listen to the Swingle Singers singing all those beautiful – I thought they were beautiful – you know, those preludes and fugues, fantasias, all kinds of things they sang so gorgeously, where you could hear all the voices. I mean beside Trevor Pinnock playing the Bach *Suites* for harpsichord and Igor Kipnis and the *Brandenburg Concertos*, which my father had recordings of. You know that was my universe as far as how string sound goes. So it probably started within that ambit. But these double elephant ... they would be rolled up as scrolls, of course. They had to be ... how else? And it goes with my notion of Baroque.

MB: You could probably get a whole string quartet on one page.

PH: Exactly. But those are my first attempts. Then, having gone to university and not completed a degree and having left university with a 2nd year behind me and taken leave of absence for 2 years I went into 3rd year and never completed that either and then left university. So I've been trying to complete my education in a way, and feel that I'm slowly trying to build towards the qualification to write bigger and bigger things. And I don't mean bigger in terms of anybody else. I mean bigger in terms of what I feel I deserve to take a bite of and try and chew and swallow. So it's a progression, certainly. And again, most of my pieces have been written with regard to certain personalities who are players. So the material on *Window to Elsewhere*, for example, revolves around Robert Pickup and Kendall Reid. Denzil Weale advised Robert to come and see me, and Robert brought Kendall Reid with him. When Robert Pickup was absent I brought Robert Carter on bass clarinet, which was amazing. Then Kendall Reid reappears on *Playola* on a song called 'Barcarolle'.

MB: Is Kendall Reid a reed player?

PH: No, he's a cellist! But he's also an animator; a digital boffin, as well as being an unbelievable cellist. And then obviously the Bow Project, which brought me to you, and brought me into contact with the Sontonga Quartet. When they then requested me to write a string quartet for them I said, 'Yes'. I'm very relieved to have finished the work because it's taken me 2 years.

MB: When you did the pieces for the Bow Project, you probably hadn't met the Sontonga Quartet?

PH: No.

MB: Does your string quartet reflect the personalities of the Sontonga Quartet, as much as, say, your pieces for Robert Pickup?

PH: Well, Robert Pickup makes my job or my work really easy because besides picking up the clarinet and putting it in his mouth, he's just an incredibly intelligent person, blindingly intelligent. And to me people like that are just like gold. Besides which, he has an improvisatory gift as well as playing the most incredible parts for clarinet and approaching it with all his virtuosity and his intelligence and his spirit. Meeting him you would never necessarily associate him with his voice as a clarinetist.

MB: No. He's a kind of regular guy, isn't he? I first met him in a pub in Belgium and we got drunk.

PH: And listening to that piece you wrote on that CD with Jill Richards, with Robert ... The piece irks me because it's called 'Untitled'. It deserves a title. It's quite extraordinary. It's a beautiful piece.

MB: But I have the same experience with Robert. I had to say very little. He just got it.

PH: The Sontonga: I like their headspace and where I think they are heading, and just the way they see themselves, is just incredible. It was not to them necessarily that I wrote. I wrote to my 'Yes' because I promised. It became very difficult to finish the piece and really it's between yourself and Waldo that I got impetus to continue and actually finish, because I'd become really swamped. I'll tell you which movement as well – it was the Malgas-Buckland Case Study which really got to me. (laughs)

MB: The case ...

PH: Yes. Problems of structure, order, texture, all kinds of things. I had all these notes about notes floating around. And then I photocopied the whole lot of them and did a cut-and-paste job: literally, because I don't have a computer. And tried to work on the structure. It was so complex and blindingly slow and it had nothing to do with fluency or notating stuff as fast as it came to me. So if the piece works as a flow I would be very happy because it came with such a huge amount of difficulty. Then it became clear having laboured so much, that I should still labour further and make a 4th movement because the piece was initially only going to have 3. I'd already had an idea about the 4th movement, and thought to leave it behind because I couldn't withstand ... [laughter] But of course what I find is that the material, the music, demands the work that you do. I think that is the best thing, because then the work can be fluent or it can be exceedingly difficult, depending on my level of craftsmanship. I mean there are severe flaws: I don't have much of a memory, and I can't read at sight very well. I've got limitations of technique as a pianist, and I write at the piano. So all these things tie me back; also voice leading and the possibilities of texture beyond my very traditional concept of what string players can do. As I said earlier, it's shaped a lot by the *Brandenburgs* and Mozart, stuff I listened to a lot as a young person and found beautiful. Then the added problem was that I was asked by Xandi van Dijk to take a good listen to Bartók's string quartets and he said to me: 'Look, if you were 22 years old and had only written one piece I would never ask you to listen to the Bartók string quartets because then you'd probably be led off your own path. But because you're an old donkey and you've written quite a few pieces and you've got a style, I don't hesitate to urge you to do that'. So that was more homework to be done. I went out and bought a recording and then Mark Uys sent me a score of the 3rd quartet and then Robert Pickup who heard what I was doing sent me the score of the 1st quartet and also sent me the

Brahms *Quintet*.

MB: So we can expect a clarinet quintet in the future?

PH: Well I don't know about the near future, [but] if I'm at all deliberately and solely going to work through things and finish them, then there ought to be a clarinet quintet. I already know part of the work will be a piece called 'Sleep Waking' which started life in 1989 and has never appeared on a recording. There's also going to be a piece called 'Pickup's Tics' because I've ... he's got a pathetic sense of humour! He found this very silly, of course. I've got the outline of this, and the title of another. But he was very encouraging, so the score's inscribed from him to wish me well in the endeavour ... He also said he's working with members of the Zurich opera in smaller ensembles.

MB: In fact at the end of last year he did my clarinet quintet at the Zurich opera house. I wasn't there. I'd just come back [to SA] and didn't feel like going back. He does have these opportunities. One imagines that the Zurich opera players are as good as he is.

PH: Writing for the Sontonga Quartet was not as closely fitting, as it were, as writing for Robert, as closely tailored. The main experience with the Sontongas was during the opera-writing workshop [at the 2003 New Music Indaba], and that was very intense: making work every day and hearing it hot-off-the-press and also that of other people on the workshop, and then performing other music as well, was the closest period I had of how they play and how they approach playing. I remember the first time I attended a rehearsal of just the quartet playing the bow pieces that I'd written ... it just blew me away. Because I'd written again with very limited vocabulary that was comfortable and to hand, so to speak, about articulation and bowings and the variety of effects possible by string players, that I was just knocked out by the beauty of the sound they made. I thought 'Wow, I've written these neat shapes and it comes out sounding so gorgeous. It's already more than I expected'. So that was a big realisation of something. I think I've got a memory of how they play, and certainly some things I heard them play have informed what I've written. Some of the simplest things I've written would probably be pretty difficult to perform because the impetus is a rhythm and they may not have performed very many such rhythms. There are parts that reflect certain aspects of Bartók, I'm sure, and certainly things I'm trying that I've not tried before when writing for strings. Hopefully, they'll flesh out their take on this piece and make it theirs.

MB: Of course other string quartets will flesh it out and make it theirs.

PH: As you said, and I was blown away by that because I wasn't aware of any other sort of future for it except firstly to say it's complete and hand it over to Mark Uys and feel very proud of that. There are lots of cycles I haven't completed.

MB: But that's completing the process. They asked you for a piece. You've written it, you've made it, they've got it.

And now it's likely that they'll premiere it next year.

PH: Oh, I didn't know that ... I thought about a series of photographs as a glossary. Because maybe they don't have anything intrinsically to do with the music but they can at least help the players inhabit the world out of which the quartet came.

MB: It will be like having a photographic introduction instead of a verbal one.

PH: It doesn't exclude the verbal. For instance, there's a unison riff they play at one point and I called it

'Chomsky's Riff', but then I thought "No, I'll call it 'Chomsky's Rift'". So now they want to know what the hell does this mean? And then there's a part called 'Fifth Column Mood' or 'The Worm' itself or the 'Malgas-Buckland Case Study'. What's going on here? And the opening of the mouth, and the opening of the throat, and this idea of ribs as well, which is not notated in the score. They want these terms explained. The actual titles: 'The Worm' is a finger exercise that I worked out, start on one of two places of symmetry on the piano keyboard. One is D, one is Ab. So if you go out in semitones away from Ab, you get white notes, then you get black notes. Those are the only two places where those symmetries occur. It's one of the things I noticed years ago because of the Hanon exercises: because they exercise one hand going in a shape but you don't duplicate it for the other hand. They [these physical symmetries] don't occur on stringed instruments, but they occur on a piano because of the arrangement of the keys. For instance, if you can stretch a certain interval of a 10th in one key and move down a semitone you may not be able to stretch it because the architecture is different. So choosing those spots was also trying to work out places of symmetry. 'The Worm' is based on that. So I've got photographs of my fingers doing 'The Worm'. Then I've wanted to take a photograph of Lorentzhill which is a block of flats in Frere Road [in Bertrams, Johannesburg], and a photograph of Derby Gents because it's a barbershop harmony song [for the quartet].

MB: The photographs do a very good job.

PH: Thank you. So that's to supplement the glossary.

MB: I want to get you to say something about your secret referencing. It reminds me of composers like Charles Ives and Erik Satie, who also have lots of little inscriptions in the score, at the beginning or end or during the course of the piece. In prefaces or writing about their pieces they do actually explain what all these things mean. Charles Ives' ones were often very obscure: private jokes or private references. I think knowing what they're about does help the players.

PH: The obscurity disappears. 'Chomsky's Rift' was written on September 11th, and he had a lot of commentary about what went on there, so that's what that's about. It may not necessarily form the musicality of the piece, won't necessarily make it a wildly interesting section. But from a player's point of view that if they're going to be mystified by these things they're always going to feel a little bit uncomfortable. A lot of the terms or the words ... I don't write words to be sung. The fact that I write a lot of words down ... I had a lot of letters, so I guess the lyric content of my pieces is in these notes, verbal notes. I guess everything I might want to say in a lyric is sort of condensed to the title of a piece, for instance. I think it's quite important; names are very important.

MB: Which is why you don't have any pieces called 'Untitled'?

PH: Exactly! That piece – it's got a hell of an atmosphere, it's got a very, very strong personality. No, I think it's unbelievable; and the voicings, extraordinary.

MB: It has a lot to do with the superb players, I have to say.

PH: I accept that and I understand you, but nonetheless ...

MB: It's a strange thing that music which on the surface is quite simple and essentially minimalist requires superb players with strong ideas and powerful minds – intellect – who can do something with it. If you gave that to just any two players who were pretty average, it would probably be an awful piece.

PH: I wonder. But I hear what you're saying.

MB: I think it's terribly important that we write for musicians we know, so that one doesn't estrange oneself from one's piece.

PH: Absolutely ... We were talking about the fact of leaving musical orphans in the world. I don't believe in it. I try and make each part interesting to play, first of all. I mean, I like the idea that there's texture and it's changing, and there's something for the player to do. There's not just marking time, or playing something really boring. So I spend a lot of time with that because I got swamped in counterpoint lessons long ago and I never seemed to have emerged. Things like voice-leading and being able to write internal voices and all that, takes a lot of effort because I feel it's a weakness that I have.

MB: But you know, something that was so beautifully striking – going back to 'Beautiful African Music' – for me, was the rhythmic counterpoint, which I presume you were aware of. It's a strong characteristic of that piece.

PH: I'm glad, because working with a drummer like Ian Herman I'm very aware of the fact that I got a metronome for the 1st time when I was 18 years old. I phoned my teacher Neil Solomon, and said, 'This thing is faulty, you know'. [MB laughs] So he laughed exactly like that, and said: 'So why does it go back in time the minute you stop playing?' [laughs] So I've tried to work next to drummers; more especially I guess, because really someone like Ian is quite extraordinary. Someone like Kevin Gibson also is extraordinary for similar but also different reasons. And again, both are blindingly intelligent people, besides having huge hearts and plenty of 'krag', you know, and the ability to be exceptionally gentle as well. But always with the heartbeat going steady. A lot of drummers prefer to play without rubato or any kind of slow gradations of pulse. So the absolute pulse they start with is the pulse they finish with, hopefully, and that's a huge sort of framework that has to invest a lot of what I do, what I write for; the idea of absolute pulse, strict tempo. Trevor Pinnock as well, you know. I mean, he's incredible. I also love listening to Keith Jarrett because he's not scared to play so beautifully and with his ... depth of technique and just *pianism* of the most exalted kind, I think is just extraordinary. When you listen to him playing those standards and making it sound like my daughter running through the fields singing nursery rhymes. That's unbelievable. He's realised that the technical scope of the player is in the service of the soul and the spirit. And that's always an important thing, that's absent from a lot of music too, and a lot of performers. But hopefully I got that message, to try for that always. So contact with the performers is essential, so that the life of your piece can carry on. They must invest it with something personal.

MB: It's easier to let go of pieces eventually if you know they're in safe hands.

PH: So your comment earlier about someone just writing a piece, putting it in the post and sending it to people they've never met or heard or had any kind of contact with, does seem very cold and calculated in a way that I could never really identify with.

MB: Exactly.

PH: I could once. I could once, when what attracted me to music was the mechanism of it and the way of translating these signs on paper into these articulations that produce the sound from a few working parts: like a watch, or a piece of machinery. And the way it interlocked ... that fascinating me. Then I heard Anton Pietersen playing piano, and that blew me away. I realised for the first time

that this is what it's about: it's your fire that has to go in the music, when you play, when you write, whatever, it's got to have your life in it, otherwise it doesn't mean much. So that's why his name is on my album. It's also on *Trains to Taung*, because I regard him as one of the most important teachers I've ever had, even though it only happened in one afternoon in the practice block at UCT Music College. He played this old clapped out Ibach upright, some Scarlatti, some Mozart, one of his own pieces. All of it was, you know, sparkling with energy. Energy, he had energy, which I felt for the first time. That was a huge lesson. I realised 'This is what it's about, actually'. It's un-nameable, what I felt. But I can recall it very clearly, because it was an epiphany. It was untitled! [laughter].

MB: I think on that note we'll pause for breakfast ...

PH: I write an incredible number of lists.

MB: I still have lists from years ago, filed away.

PH: Slower things also have a place, you know? [laughs] I have to believe so ...

MB: Yes. I've started changing my methods. Instead of having hundreds of lists I have one of those things called a 'stickie' on my computer screen, on my desktop.

PH: A stickie? Oh my goodness ... Sounds close to a wet dream, hey?

MB: You get different colours. And I just update it on a daily basis.

PH: Well I have to redraw my 'screens': I don't have a computer. But what I do have is a mother page, which is lists of books I wanna get, people I should call, letters I wanna write, works that I need to make, stuff for the house, you know. Just a whole bunch of stuff on one page. But I've got hundreds of mother pages! Some of which I took off certain things and then made a new one with some of the other ones still on it, to which I add new ones. Like the String Quartet, which has appeared on a number of mother pages, is now finally ticked, and can be erased forever.

MB: It's been un-mothered.

PH: Indeed! It's been birthed. What was better for my general state of nervous tension – and you know what? It worked for a couple of weeks at the beginning of the year – was to have no list. I have piles of papers, and no matter what I do to clear those papers there are always other papers. There are tasks that I want to do for myself that always get superseded by other tasks. You forgot why you put it in that pile, with those things under it, and so on. So it's like uncovering different sorts of histories for oneself. You're in one place in one body, you know, and you've got these multiple recent pasts to investigate through. It doesn't add up to much. But anyway ... I also think that by writing down ideas or thoughts or wishes it helps me to see them somehow towards completion. So I'm quite heartened by the fact that you've got lists that are years old, because I do too.

MB: The point about having something on a list is so that you can eventually delete it.

PH: Also to nail it to your door or something. It marks you, it says "This is something I have made and I want to get to it".

MB: I also find that if I do something that was never on the list and I complete it I put it on the list and then I cross it off, otherwise I haven't actually made any progress.

PH: Exactly. I do the same.

MB: Talking of lists and talking of storing, I want to talk about wardrobes.

PH: Ja?

MB: I loved that image of the – won't you say it again, with the right accent? – 'die ou' and the wardrobe.

PH: Oh ja. Khaya Mahlangu, the sax player. He was telling me this story about a gig that he had played, and then taking a break, and talking to members of the audience, and one of his friends, absolutely loving what they'd just played and said, 'hey maar daai ou, hy speel daai wardrobe, jong' (talking about the upright bass player). [laughs] And you know exactly what he's talking

about, because I've seen thousands of such wardrobes. They're a feature of many people's innermost sanctums. They're not always monuments to brilliant taste, of course. But that image is pretty good; I love it. So I've honoured that image by calling a work that I'm making 'Mngwandi's Wardrobe'.

MB: Is this the piece that you were busy with ten years ago?

PH: Exactly.

MB: And you

promised it to Jimmy Mngwandi, and he phoned you up ten years later, is that right?

PH: Well he didn't have to phone me because we were together rehearsing, and then performing with Steve Dyer. We had material from an album on which both Jimmy and I played, called *Son of the Soil*. And during that period of rehearsing quite a few days and then performing, in the course of conversation he asked me to write him a piece. Having gone back to lists, in this case a diary from 1993, I looked through it, because I unearthed it in one of my huge blue trunks, and I thought, I want to see what I was doing in 1993. The diary's a helluva lot smaller and it's less full, but one of the things in there was that Jimmy Mngwandi had asked me to write a piece. Which is amazing really, because it was before I had recorded any albums or embarked on pieces that were outside the typical format within which I had been working and writing for many years, which was like a four- or five-piece band. He was talking about strings and woodwinds



Paul Hanmer and his case during a 'pointless breakfast' at Belem, Kensington, Johannesburg, 5.5.05

and all kinds of things. So I decided at the end of 2004 to actually make a start on the piece.

MB: How's it going?

PH: Well I left it for a while. Because I finished the string quartet and I also started doing some gigs. I find the thing of taking my equipment and going out of the house and journeying to a rehearsal room and meeting up with the guys, and playing, and coming back, and trying to organise gigs in terms of phoning and faxing and getting stuff together: it's all about music but it's not music. I find in periods like that I don't have the writing ability, so to speak, because I have to think about other abilities like trying to negotiate a price and asking for certain conditions and making sure everybody else understands the demands of time and place, calling rehearsals – all the administration. It's extremely necessary and I think it's important that a musician manages to do that, too, yet it's probably as old as music that the people who are not musicians have always exploited that space, that musical space. They approach the musician in that musical space and talk about business. Then the musician is not able to inhabit that business space, that administrative space and gives quick answers and gets rid of that administrative person, and they then sell themselves down many rivers, in the process. And so I do think that any kind of craft or work must operate within one's life; and to make it function one has to serve one's craft and one's craft also has to serve one. Dealing with the business of the music is extraordinarily important, because it's one of the most complicated businesses imaginable.

MB: But I know exactly what you mean. It upsets the flow ...

PH: ... or the space which you inhabit. Because you have to inhabit another space.

MB: It's a sort of grounding process, isn't it? Brings you back to reality as well.

PH: I think it's a practicality. I don't think the music is any less real.

MB: No, no. But the fact is that you have to see your music as a commodity as well.

PH: Indeed.

MB: And if you don't treat it like that, you'll be exploited.

PH: Even when I don't treat it like that I still get exploited, because my knowledge and my ability to reason, my bargaining ability and my measurement of my own worth – it's all up in the air anyway, it changes depending on what's going on in my feelings at the time. And it's subject to change all the time. I still don't have a standard contract or, you know, because there are so many sub-standard or industry-standard or multi-standard situations out there. For instance that contract to write a string quartet: it was just, "Would you write a string quartet?" "Yes." That's the contract. Then there's no money changing hands, there's no time limit, there's no dictator except my own motivation to honour my promise. That's it.

MB: It's a very different thing, ja.

PH: So commissions can focus one's energy too, and they're useful. The last thing I was commissioned to do was to write music for a documentary. The main picture was LP covers from Verve and Blue Note, jazz recordings made in the sixties. That was the kind of image.

MB: And you are supposed to match it?

PH: That's the kind of thing. So I have to have Marcus [Wyatt] on trumpet and Herbie Tsoaeli on bass – on wardrobe! – and Kevin [Gibson] on drums, and play what I imagined to be the musical climate of South Africa in 1961 and '64, you know, and work from there. And that's wonderful, because you make music that you would not

otherwise have made.

MB: Do you remember what kind of music was happening in the sixties? Since you would have been a little boy?

PH: Well, ja. I was born in '61, so it's awfully close to the '60s.

MB: But I mean in terms of being aware of it.

PH: I guess my memory is subliminal, more of Ella Fitzgerald, and Louis Armstrong, Petula Clark!

MB: Sandy Shore?

PH: Not me. But Frank Sinatra with big band, those gorgeous Nelson Riddle arrangements, singing those extraordinary songs that are so schmaltzy and cheesy but somehow incredible. And Trevor Pinnock ...

MB: But he wasn't around in the '60s.

PH: No. It was Igor Kipnis at that time, and Glenn Gould playing the *Goldberg Variations*.

MB: Did you ever come across Rosalind Tureck?

PH: Yes. And who was the other harpsichordist? Wanda Landowska. So those things stand out, and also the Swingle Singers doing Bach. Those things informed my earliest memories, not music from South Africa. The first [SA] music that was brought into our house was the recording of 'Mannenberg' by Dollar Brand, which my father went out and bought and played very loudly, I remember. When I was six or seven or so.

MB: I'm sure it was some time in the '70s.

PH: You're quite right. I think it's because 'Yakhal'inkomo' came out in '67 or '68, and has a similar life to 'Mannenberg'. And not just to other incarnations, like Sibongile Khumalo performing 'Yakhal'inkomo' with words, and so on, but that original recording.

MB: The original recording is a classic, completely seminal.

PH: But I remember my father bringing it into the house on LP, you know, and putting on the hi-fi *loud* that day, and the extraordinary effect it had. This really wild sound, so loud and with so much spirit in it. I went to see my first live band when I was only in matric. My friend Keith Tabisher who also brought me to meet Anton Pietersen, took me to the Sherwood Lounge in Mannenberg to listen to Pacific Express. And that blew my socks off. And that's why I left university eventually to join a band that was not playing classical music, was playing other stuff. It sort of changed the shape of my musical future, because I'd thought when I was at university that I was going to be a classical musician, and while in 1st year I knew that I didn't want to have what it took to become a concert soloist as a piano player, but certainly as a chamber musician, blah blah blah, I thought, 'yes, I will do this, I know I'm going to do it'. So you see the string quartet, in a way, ... I'm slowly, slowly trying to expand, and buying Gordon Jacob and having Walter Piston, and having recently been given the Adler orchestration book.

MB: Wow! That's wonderful.

PH: I'd never heard of it. A recently acquired friend from Canada just gave me this book. It's extraordinary.

MB: That's the one I use all the time.

PH: It was just so refreshing, after ... At Wits university you know, again, trying to finish my degree and bring it to conclusion, I failed to do so. That orchestration course [with Walter Mony] was just a regurgitation of Piston. There was nothing in it, actually. It was quite depressing. That's where I also saw – this was in '92 – saw people of twenty years old, eighteen, stooping and walking. I thought, "no man, these are young people. I'm older than

most of these people here, and they're studying music, but they look like they're halfway to the grave already. They look so depressed and over-laden and subdued and subjugated". And I thought, 'no, no, no, this is not cool' ... The piano teacher told me, 'why aren't you studying jazz piano?' And the Head of the Faculty kept introducing me to brown people, you know, like that is important. And it's like, "No man, I'm not here to fit into some kind of shoebox that you've laid out for yourself, I'm here to do certain things and I want to do them". But anyway. That was quite a miserable experience. So coming to the [Wits] Atrium to hear the final part of the second phase of The Bow Project was quite a nice thing: it filled that Atrium with something fresh for me. It's an extremely ambient space, that.

MB: That's where Untitled was recorded.

PH: Wow.

MB: It would be interesting to talk about something that you're doing right now.

PH: Well, a year ago, a guitar player called Sasha Sonnlichler approached me to write music for his next album. I wrote some pieces and presented them to him, and then I asked him, 'Why are you asking me to write this?', because he spoke to me about the instrumentation he was imagining: guitar, saxophone, trumpet, bass, drums. I said, 'so there's no piano? Why me now?' He said, 'Because I love what I've heard'.

MB: He'd kind of written you out of the script in a way? [laughs]

PH: Exactly. That interested me a lot. That he still wanted me to write. Again it's that thing of being a part of what you write, and being a part of performing what you write, which the string quartet takes me away from, and The Bow Project ...

MB: ... and the wardrobe piece.

PH: Exactly. So that fired my interest. And then a few months after having played him three pieces including 'Hoeri Kwaggo' which is an ancient Khoisan name for Table Mountain, and 'African couch potato', and another one – I can't remember – he spoke to me about producing his next album. So that's what I'm about to be doing.

MB: Is this the one with your songs on it?

PH: Yes. So now I'm writing more songs for it. And also re-writing, based on fragments that he's written: multiple possibilities of the start of a phrase that he's written – I'm now making pieces out of these things. Trying to write horn charts, and invent new pieces to bring up the tally of songs, writing out guitar parts, and saxophone, trumpet, trombone ...

MB: You're using fragments of his music to compose the songs. Have you ever done anything like that before?

PH: Plenty of times, plenty, plenty.

MB: Why can't he write the songs himself?

PH: I suppose he could, but he won't, because he's thinking beyond the music itself: he's thinking who's going to listen to it? will his mother will like it? is it hip enough?

MB: Oh I see. So he's not a focused composer.

PH: And also I've cut away parts, so it's musical surgery. And I believe that as a musician I ought to be able to write a piece, repair a piece, build extensions onto a piece, repaint it, do whatever with it. It's part of what I've done for years.

MB: When you work like this, do you wear a green cap and theatre gown?

PH: Virtually! [laughs] But I'm ruthless!

MB: That's fascinating. Are his fragments good?

PH: Some of them are pretty good. I'm taking his pieces and cutting them down to size, and extending them, and formatting them, and making them all 'of a piece'. I've decided to step in, with the scalpel, I'm the plastic surgeon

waiting to change the face of the pieces he's got.

MB: So in your Dr Frankenstein role you're actually shaping his musical personality?

PH: Well, I'm making the vehicles on which his musical personality will ride. I'm trying to make them all have four wheels, and a differential, and some brakes that work.

MB: In other words, you're giving him composition lessons. You're showing him what can be done with the material.

PH: If he wishes to look he will see, but if he chooses not to look, he will not see. He may just see that I've changed his pieces and he doesn't like it. But I cannot afford to do otherwise, because the amount of directions he wants to take are far too many to be covered in one album, I believe. So if the pieces are going to carry my personality, that's also fine. He's bringing more fragments, and I'm not looking forward to that, because to try and honour the fragments and acknowledge what's good about them and work other music around what's there...

MB: Has he ever written a complete piece?

PH: I don't think do.

MB: Will you be credited jointly as composers?

PH: Absolutely! I mean part of the reason he's getting this recording deal is through my involvement.

MB: Okay.

PH: It's publishing money that is paying for the recording: we've got a publishing, special projects-type budget, and even that is bigger than what we might have gotten, because of my involvement. And also why I mentioned earlier about getting another umbrella for these works, because it will be under another publisher, not Gallo. It will be co-writing and pieces that I've written on my own. So the reconstructive surgery will also carry a percentage as well as the pieces in their own right.

MB: Interesting new category for SAMRO, isn't it?

PH: [laughs] Well, I think plenty people do it; and I'm sure you'd know exactly what would need to be done of you came across certain work, and I'm sure you do it when you teach compositions, plenty times.

MB: Reconstruct students' work? Yes. Or make suggestions.

PH: Indeed. But because the studio date is so close I can't make suggestions, I have to be definite.

MB: You just go in with the knife.

PH: That's it. You know, if it's too much of a pressure, that's fine, we'll do it another time. Make another Paul Hanmer album out of these things. The one I started working on first, with this reconstructive surgery process, I think it's going to be called 'Lament'. It's really slow, it's quite beautiful, it's quite schmaltzy, and I think it's going to be quite special. So I hope he likes it.

MB: Has he heard any of your reconstructions yet?

PH: Only over the phone. It's actually really nice the way he plays. The sound, very good, mainly electric guitar. Not many people get a really great sound, but I think he gets a beautiful sound and that's definitely in his favour. But stylistically a lot of the fragments were in this sort of mediums swing tempo, they just sound like an era from Glenn Miller, you know. The compositions and the type of chordal progressions and so on. So it'll be an investigatory experience to see how we deal with this and how it progresses.

MB: So this is pretty much what you're tied up to for the next two weeks?

PH: Indeed. And reading Antjie Krog. Unbelievable!

MB: I've asked Marc [Uys] to send me a list of performances [of The Bow project] so that we can make sure the royalties are all sorted out. I've now got a response from Michael Levy on your status. You weren't classified as 'serious' and all that. I was thinking that SAMRO's obviously going to have to invent some new classification for people who are working on both spheres.

PH: The guy that organised for me to get a commission to write a piece for the International jazz Festival Rotterdam last September, Eric van der Westen (also a wardrobe player!), on a previous visit to South African he came to dinner at our house, and he was asking me how I classify my pieces. He first raised the question, 'What category do you register your music under?' And he said, 'You must go and re-register all your pieces that have written-out things because you'll earn more money'.

MB: Exactly.

PH: And I said that I think it's not necessarily my place to nominate something like that, you know what I'm saying? So I feel very comfortable with the idea that you've done so on my behalf.

MB: Well I've at least broached the subject.

PH: Because I don't think, since I joined [SAMRO] in 1988 I've never received any other type of [declaration] forms, and I don't think it's for me to say what type of music I write, on the one hand. On the other hand and on a very important hand as well, really, because I think to try and elevate one's status, I don't think it's nice. Do you know what I'm saying?

MB: I think you're being overly modest. Because as this person said you would get more money [for] a piece of fixed duration which is entirely written out. It's interesting that under the old regime SAMRO had their Light Music classification – you're included under light music – it included all the black composers who wrote choral music in tonic solfa. I presume that was because I assume it was not considered as being 'written out' in the same way as Arnold van Wyk.

PH: That's right.

MB: It was a kind of 'shorthand'. And that's entirely untrue, because it's longhand, it's as much written out as what you or I do. I think I'll take this further. Because the same is going to apply to people like Julia Raynham, others in future, even Carlo [Mombelli].

PH: But also, you know, I've sent all my scores to them, of everything I've written. I don't know where they go, or if anyone takes note. I've done it since 1988. I mean, the amount of photocopies of pieces they've got in from me ought to be this high [18 inches].

MB: Do you get royalties for your jazz pieces?

PH: Yes.

MB: Every time they're performed? or only recordings?

PH: Not live performances so much. Because the way to fill out those forms has become a lot more complicated, in a way, because they insist that you need the signature of the venue owner, you know. And that's not always something in my habit to do, you know, it's more like get there, sound check, bring your SAMRO form for someone to sign – although it is wherever you go in Europe, and for anything. Just for performing a set of my music in a small festival in Cully in 2002, just for performing those pieces once, I got over R6 000 in royalties. That's not from radio play, nothing, that's just from performing at a festival. We play big festivals here, bigger than at Cully in terms of the number of people who attend and the footprint of the radio advertising that goes on before, and so on, but I don't think there's a standard practice of bringing round SAMRO forms for everything. Although

there's probably a pile getting dusty in an office somewhere, of SAMRO forms that should have exactly gone there, for the performers to fill out. I do believe SAMRO would have allocated such a thing and made provision for it, you know. But I can't fill out those forms myself; I do need the signature of the venue owner, etc. etc. So there's a lot of that which goes in the cracks. Until a few years ago they were encouraging composers to fill in those forms and sign them themselves. But in recent correspondence from SAMRO it seems that that ruling has changed: they now want it done legitimately ...

MB: I wonder if there was a bit of fraud?

PH: Absolutely. Any system where you can sign on your own behalf as well as the behalf of so-and-so, and so-and-so, is bound to be fraudulent, or certainly wide open to fraud.

MB: Excessive amount of gigging going on ...

PH: When you're sitting at home rolling a joint, or something (both laugh).