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Playing the Changes: Jazz at an African University and on the Road

Darius Brubeck
Catherine Brubeck
University of Illinois Press (Jul 9, 2024)
Softcover $24.95 (352pp)
978-0-252-08826-1

Drawing on oral history, photographs, and letters, Darius and Catherine Brubeck revisit their inauguration of a fertile jazz music launchpad in South Africa during and after apartheid in *Playing the Changes*.

The book's vibrant recollections traverse eras, beginning with Darius's acceptance of a position in 1983 as a music lecturer at the University of Natal in Durban, where he had designs on introducing a Jazz Studies program. And the Brubecks' custodianship of the program happened at such a time that they faced ubiquitous political and cultural obstacles, including economic barriers for musicians and layers of bureaucratic noise coinciding with South Africa's racial divides.

The story is told from both Brubecks' perspectives; they take turns recalling their efforts and contribute anecdotal sidebars covering sweet and tragic moments from their work. With the help of others, they realized the lofty goal of creating the first-ever university degree in Jazz Studies in Africa, hoping to entrench the common language of music into the cultural bedrock in Durban and beyond. Darius's ascensions to professorship and directorship roles precipitated the worldwide travels of representative jazz ensembles like the Jazzanians and various iterations of the Nu Jazz band. A strong sample of South African musicians, including Zim Ngqawana, Lulu Gontsana, Allen Kwela, and Johnny Mekoa, features into the story; each played critical artistic roles in bringing music from the townships to the world.

"I always felt music was essential to a good life," Catherine writes. Fellow academics, humanitarians, adventurers, and jazz-heads will be enthralled by *Playing the Changes*, a powerful work of music history about a couple who reached great artistic heights because of their mutual vision and tenacity.

RYAN PRADO (July / August 2024)

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