

The Afrikaans Album



Voëlury

Far from the old Kalahari, a new generation of Afrikaners are fitting three-litre V8 engines into the ox-wagons of Afrikaans musical culture. And they aren't taking their stukkies to the drive-in either. Instead they are trekking over the Rubicon to see whether there is more to life than 'will you love me, baby'.

Driven by the spectre of a smug suburbia, they have come together at Shifty Records and recorded a compilation album of Afrikaans songs; and judging by the response to Die Eerste Alternatiewe Afrikaans Konsert, it's really going to stir things up.

This album is not another feeble, self-conscious attempt at emulating overseas Top 20 hits with affected accents. Neither does it consist of trite themes told through banal lyrics.

It is the 'hot Karoo soul' of Khaki Monitor, Die Gereformeerde Blues Band's bluesy, fifties rock'n roll; it is 'muurmusiek' (as distinguished from 'kamermusiek') by Koos; it is the Cape flats goema of the Genuines; The Kerels' 'potjiekos pop'; it is Randy Rambo en die Rough Riders; Bernoldus Niemand, Pieter van der Lugt and Andre Letoit.

It's new, it's contemporary, it's Afrikaans. "The existing Afrikaans music," says Randy Rambo, "caters for people over forty. This music is much more in touch with the times."



KOOS



A description given by Koos of themselves leaves one with an impression of anything but a band. A six- and sometimes seven-piece group replete with two vocalists, a guitarist, a drummer, a bass player and a keyboardist (sometimes two), they will tell you there is only one musician! The others, it transpires, are well-known actors or (visual) artists. "When we work together we work in a performance-art context," says 'Moos', vocalist and original member of Koos, who, like the others, uses a pseudonym. When they come together as Koos they are, in fact, first and foremost musicians.

The present line-up has been constant for almost two years, but, says Moos, "the membership is flexible; people come and go. It is an opportunity to express oneself or the ideas one may have."

And the music? That too is flexible. "It is sociology rather than music," offers guitarist 'Noos'. "Most of our stuff is borrowed," explains 'Moos'. "We get our lines from the poetry of newspapers".

I look expectant and 'Goos' comes to my aid: "It is not kamermusiek (chamber music), it is more like muurmusiek (wall-music)."

Their distinctive style, which is unmistakably Koos, nevertheless seems resilient to the sticky stuff of labels. The music changes to accommodate changing circumstances: "We had to alter this number a bit when we returned the cymbals we had borrowed. It has a different sound now."

Adaptability; 'Moos' sees it as minimalism. "Like Grotowsky's 'poor theatre': poor music." He chuckles. He can afford to be modest: the music is nowhere near 'poor'.

Their songs are primarily in Afrikaans, unusual for a pop-rock band, but for Koos this is purely a matter of chance: "Our songs are in Afrikaans simply because most of us are Afrikaans-speaking. Also because the best writing we could find happened to be in Afrikaans."

"You have been labelled 'boere-punk'...", I venture. "We are trying to get away from the punk label. It is important not to be called punk which was a historical movement. As a fashion it still exists, but it is not what we are trying to do. Nor are we trying to fit in the rock mould. I would describe our music as

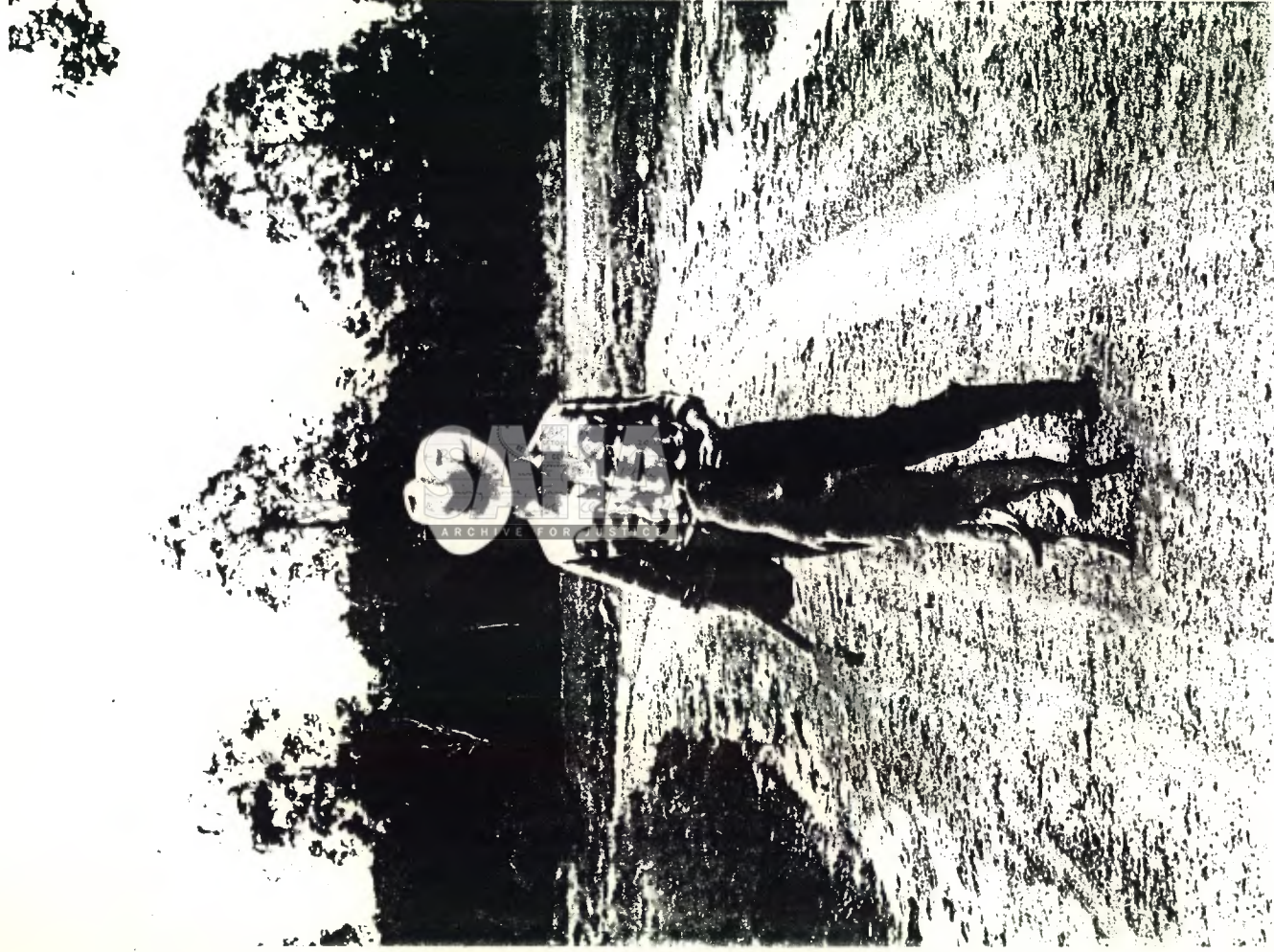
contemporary: contemporary muurmusiek" (Moos).

Dare I ask the reason for doing it? They reply almost in unison: "Because if we don't we'll go crazy. It's a kind of therapy for ourselves to keep sane in this place."

Exciting, intelligent, subtle, different, difficult (you may have heard their demo of Delilah several times on Radio 5, a single of which will be released by Shifty early next year), they feature with two new songs, **Sing Jy Van Bonne** and **Cowboy** on a rather exceptional compilation album produced by Shifty Records of contemporary music, exclusively in Afrikaans.



BERNOLDUS NIEMAND



Three years ago, Shifty Records released "Wie is Bernoldus Niemand?", an album of songs that broke new ground: for the first time somebody sang in the rock 'n roll idiom in Afrikaans. The album met with much critical acclaim, but little commercial success; his cynical depictions of life in the army ("Hou My Vas Korporaal"), facial fashion in Pretoria ("Snor City"), and late night love at the Drive-in ("Welcome to My Car"), all fell foul of the radio programmers, and the lack of airplay ensured that the album didn't reach the public at large. Over the last three years, however, Bernoldus has become something of a cult hero, his rapturous reception at the "Eerste Alternatiewe Afrikaanse Pop Konsert" underlining this. The reappearance of "Snor City" on this compilation, with it's great dance floor groove and marvellous tongue-in-cheek humour, will reveal Bernoldus at his best to all those who haven't been lucky enough to hear him before, and confirm his place in the hearts of all those who already know his music.



Pop Chat

MARC LE CHAT



Bernoldus Niemand ... it's a complicated thing being a South African.

You can't help but notice Bernoldus

I COULDN'T help but notice it. The purple cover leered out and snatched attention. Lying there innocently on the Shifty Records table in Greenmarket Square.

Who? What?

Wie Is Bernoldus Niemand, of course — the first vinyl onslaught from the man of the same name who is fast becoming the main generator of SA satire since David Kramer got carried away on the shoulders of some front-row rugby forward.

Bernoldus Niemand — this is the soul of white South Africa speaking. Not that he would be so irresponsible to say so himself.

A voice from the road-house, mine-dump, drive-in reality.

"It's a confusing, uh... complicated thing being South African."

Like promising yourself you're never going to touch an army uniform when you finish your two years, and then end up pulling on the khaki socks when the rest are at the laundromat?

"Ous must still be proud of the place where they come from. Even more, they mustn't deny South African music the chances it deserves."

Yea sure but...

Suburbia

"I could never pretend to be eVoid and stick beads on me. I'm from white suburbia. I don't pretend to be anything else."

As Johnny Clegg once astutely commented: "The white experience is being able to relate your experience as a white African. To be valid is to capture what we're going through."

For starters — Hou My Vas Korporaal (army blues), then — Welcome To My Car (a monument to the East Rand's moving shrines), Boksburg Bommer (knocking the block off the white South African day-dream that our sports heroes are unbeatable), Reggae Vibes Is Cool (a dig at the red-eye syndrome), and — Pretoria Megavibes (a look at "snor-city").

But wait. James Phillips was born in Springs and started out with the late '70s Springs rock 'n roll band Corporal Punishment, responsible for some of the really decent songs to come out of the period.

Leather lummies

Seeking change from leather lummies and peering through the windscreen at drive-ins he caught a train to Grahamstown to take a music degree, got tired of small-town dealings and went back to Joburg to finish the education for Bernoldus' sake.

You see, Bernoldus is James and James is not Bernoldus. If you know what I mean.

It goes like this. In early 1983, James brought out Hou My Vas Korporaal under the Bernoldus Niemand guise — a case of extreme tongue in cheek. Because the name actually means nothing.

It allows him to look at the white reality and be it at the same time. So he's not fooling himself or anyone else.

Most, but not all of the songs are sung in Afrikaans, though James is English-speaking.

English boy

"It's confusing, not many people call me James anymore. They kind of dream up what they want you to be like. I just have to handle it."

But Ber... James, if you can't be him all the time, aren't you poking your nose into other people's business without the risk of getting it bloodied? Gus Silber in the Times said you were maybe an English boy poking fun at the Afrikaners.

"He doesn't know there are people like me alive in this country. I scheme he's got it all wrong. He doesn't think people who speak Afrikaans are real."

But it's real in a place like Springs, where James heard and learnt how to speak like only a South African can.

"The hardest thing of all is to sing South African. The flat accent. The Corporals were dogmatic about this and people would say: What a nice band, but they sound *too* South African."

Although the Boksburg Bommer video was on Teletien, "the SABC doesn't really dig Bernoldus." Which is a shame.

More people need to hear things like... "jy speel oorlog met my beste dae — ja,ja,ja" (Hou My Vas Korporaal).

"Hou My Vas had to be in Afrikaans, you know the experience is basically that. It could never be done in English. Afrikaners are the most alienated of the lot. But all South Africans can listen to the music — it's not cut off from anybody. It's a sweat to write them but it's not forced."

The music is honest and really good — although radio probably regards it as too hot to handle. 702, for one refuses to play any song with Afrikaans lyrics.

James' rock 'n roll band, the Cherry Faced Lurchers have recorded a live album due for release by Shifty in about a month's time.

He'd like to tour small towns as Bernoldus, but then in the future maybe Niemand will take a back seat at the drive-in and allow James to be Phillips.

But all James really wants is for more people to buy guitars anyway.

ANDRÉ LETOIT



Andre Letoit - well known punk author, pizza chef, chicken salesman and songwriter. Letoit's life reads a little like a Hunter Thompson novel: his first published short story was banned in 1981, in the same year he was involved in the first ever blasphemy trial in South Africa, and his songs tell the rest of the story on "Ver Van Die Ou Kalahari", a limited edition cassette released by Shifty Records in July last year. The cassette generated much interest; nobody had ever written Afrikaans lyrics like this before. No sacred cows for this man - topics for Letoit lyrics range from love across the colour bar to the title track which deals with the "chicken run". Letoit's songs are both humourous and critical of this bizarre time in which we live - "Ver van die ou Kalahari, aan die grens se verkeerde kant, eet ons weer saam calamari, en dink aan die dalende rand".



KHAKI MONITOR



Khaki Monitor first appeared five years ago at The Mix in Cape Town. The event was the start of a saga of changing personnel that would have destroyed most bands after three months, but the nucleus of Willie Saayman on bass and Tonia Selly on vocals remained throughout, and the slow development of their "Hot Karoó Soul" continued. Sadly, the band eventually broke up at the end of last year, but Shifty managed to get some recordings, and one of these, "Warrelwind" appears on this compilation album.

The name Khaki Monitor comes from one of their lyrics: "Ek is die monitor wat in jou kamer staan/ Ek is die khaki man/ Ek weet wat hier aangaan."

Saayman wrote of his surroundings, the drought, the media, using English and Afrikaans, and their music was an equal mixture of funk, blues, and soul.

By the middle of 1987 they had tightened into what seemed to be a permanent outfit with Steve Howells on drums (who had given the Dynamics their punch and has since done the same for the Cherry-Faced Lurchers), Penni Flascas on guitar and Sheree Harrison backing vocals. But Saayman changed his tune and went instead to London where he is now writing science fiction novels.

Due to their rare performances and subsequent demise, Khaki Monitor's track 'Warrelwind' on the Afrikaans compilation should excite all South African music followers.



Johannesburg group Khaki Monitor.

THE ARTS



Picture: ERIC MILLER, ASPIN

Khaki Monitor: hanging up the washing while waiting for devilish inspiration to visit the backyards of Yeoville

Dad, you're right. Khaki cast a spell

WILLIE SAAAYMAN's father used to say that Khaki Monitor played *duiwelsmusiek*. He would get the local pastor to pray for his son. Saayman has black hair gelled to stand up and he's sitting on the floor of his flat in Yeoville. He has penetrating grey-blue eyes in a narrow face. He doesn't look like evil incarnate. He says, "I don't think we play *duiwelsmusiek*."

Perhaps not. But Khaki Monitor's pop pulls you unsuspectingly into its hot-and-cold heart with a surprising power. As Saayman senior might agree, it casts a spell. Here's a half-jangling guitar, there's a melodic, a child's instrument consisting of a plastic keyboard with a blow-tube attached. Now a lyric: "All Americans can dance/ and 70 percent have beer

People call Khaki Monitor serious and strange. With a new drummer and a series of gigs lined up, NIGEL WRENCH reckons they're about the hottest thing in town

in their fridges/ I wonder what they have for breakfast."

At the centre of this worshipful thing is Saayman on bass and Tonia Selly (laughing eyes, tumble of black hair, has a record collection that consists only of Aretha Franklin, Dollar Brand and Marvin Gaye) on vocals. Selly's voice isn't trained, but its soaring, weaving quality might be Joni Mitchell, it might be Ricky Lee Jones. Selly's voice is devilishly hypnotic.

She and Saayman disagree on just about everything. Selly: "Life, philosophy ... " Saayman: "Movies, books ... " Music, too. Selly grimaces cheerfully when Saayman confesses to loving Madonna and Prince. Selly says, "Sometimes the disagreement helps. It's good because you criticise each other ... " Saayman: "You don't criticise. You scream."

They have been together in Khaki Monitor for almost four years, with a changing cast. Selly: "I went up to Willie at a club in Cape Town and said 'I'd like to be in your band'." Saayman had an Afrikaans punk group. Tania: "We had an occasional trumpeter who couldn't play. No wait, you'd better say he was just learning." She breaks off into a large grin.

Khaki Monitor don't play a lot because they're a part-time band. They have Peni Flascas on guitar and Shere Harrison on

backing vocals and percussion. Everyone has a fulltime job: This is great music, but it doesn't pay.

The big thing that's happened to them this year is a new drummer in Steve Howells, whose work with The Asylum Kids and The Dynamics was never short of driving. He has added a hard backbeat to Khaki Monitor's music and the enigmatic songs (now funky, now bluesy, now soulful) are actually danceable.

But the lyrics are central. Saayman: "Bad lyrics are just the worst." He writes about the drought (in one song a character drives around the Karoo with dryness in his pocket, looking for a place to spread it), they are obsessed with the media (in what may be their best tune *Cracked Tin Radio* a girl desperately searches for someone she's heard on her radio) and there are also love songs. Saayman grins. "Always written after the fire."

They have songs in Afrikaans and there's one chorus that goes, "*Ons is gebore om hier te vrek*". Saayman: "It's not so much a political song as a response ... it's a difficult song. People are always tied to this country. Wherever they go they will die here."

Saayman writes in Afrikaans simply because he is Afrikaans and sometimes this creates open hostility. "I think a lot of English people don't like Afrikaans which is their problem, not mine." Selly: "We've had people sitting on the stage with their backs to us."

Saayman is keen, though to subvert the language. He will use a word out of context because he likes its sound and his Afrikaans songs are hardly ordinary ones. "Afrikaans songs are all the same. The background is always sweet. The flowers are always very pretty and the relationships are very beautiful. There are no divorces, nothing. There's no family murders in Afrikaans songs." There are no family murders in Khaki Monitor's songs either, not yet anyway.

Saayman is a committed observer and that's the key to his lyrics. It also explains the band's name which comes from one of their more sinister songs: "*Ek is die monitor wat in jou kamer staan Ek is die khaki mani Ek weet wat hier aangaan*."

Khaki Monitor practice a lot (in the bedroom in Saayman's little flat, the neighbours don't complain which must say something) and it shows. What they want to do more than anything is a record. They've done an impressive demo tape which Saayman is to trundle around to record companies in the hope of getting some backing, some time in the studio.

But this is their fourth demo already, the fourth time Saayman has made that door-to-door trip. Saayman: "They always say our music is too sophisticated." He smiles wryly. "I don't think we're sophisticated. Or they say it's interesting. Those are their two words, 'interesting' and 'sophisticated'."

"We've always wanted to make a record but no-one wants us. We've got a definite problem." Actually, the problem lies with a record industry that's simply too conservative to take on a band as out of the ordinary as Khaki Monitor.

But Khaki Monitor are smiling. Saayman and Selly are gleefully disagreeing again. They have a creative chemistry that's produced a demon of a good, odd, pop band. *Duiwelsmusiek* or not.

● Khaki Monitor start two weeks of gigs at Jameson's this weekend.