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Interview with Hannalie Coetzee

Emphasis in *italics*.

NB: sound quality extremely poor on this recording.

Michael Drewett [MD]: So, Hannalie, I just want just to start by saying what was the general context at Shifty when you first started there, I mean what – what were the issues they were facing, and so on.

Hannalie Coetzee [HC]: OK, well when I first started with Shifty, we were still in Pimm Street, in those offices there, at Mega Music; there's now a road been built through it called Miriam Makeba Street. But, er – I mean there – it was – kind of – our issues were distribution, manufacture, I mean we – I'll start ordering my thoughts, it'll become clearer, um. Y'know, Warrick Sony was very good in dealing with the – getting the albums out, y'know. That was always his job – he'd sort of stepped away from that by the time I joined. But, I mean, I just know that – there was one place where you could master vinyl, at EMI, and there was a guy called Pietman. You must ask Warrick about Pietman, have you heard about Pietman? [laughs]

So I mean we – we were sabotaged on that level as well, I mean we once got albums back that had, like – it almost looked like it had, er – hard – cardboard fibres in it, y'know. So I mean the quality of our albums weren't – from manufacture. So when I started, we distributed through EMI. And you know, so – and it was also before digital, so I mean we used to have to, y'know, just to get our cover artwork done took, like, six weeks; cause you had to have posi's made, and all of – that sort of stuff. Um. I know that Pietman in

particular had a problem with – the material. And I mean he was just – a master, a person who was supposed to master; and he would *stop* things, you know, or break them, or – whatever – so... But we, we had the mail order side of things, that we had an ad in the *Mail & Guardian*, then the *Weekly Mail*. And an ad in the *Vrye Weekblad*. Warrick ran that for years. Mail order service. Cause a lot of the material was banned. [Timecode – 00:02:21]

And then I, for about two years, I ran a fleamarket stall, at the Market Theatre, there was quite a good, big, vibrant market there as well. So, I mean, from – our biggest challenge was the fact that we – were banned. You know, and I don't think the challenges that we faced in terms of distribution etc was much different from what – independents face today. You know; they just have different tools, but we – Shifty always somehow found goodwill somewhere, y'know like, *within* EMI there were people who were really... We moved from EMI to Tusk. To Benjy Mudie, and then Tusk got bought out by BMG. So... I mean in terms of getting things in the shops, it's always a hassle if you're a small independent, you know, we had that – and there were people who wouldn't touch stuff, y'know? So – er – but we – it was – definitely there was a – a market for it, it was sought after, people came to our office. You know if people wanted stuff, like you said Matthew van der Want, they found it. You know? And we sold at gigs and that. I just think – I mean poor Lloyd probably lost – you know people would come for stock and he'll sign the book and whatever, and I don't know much of that money [laughs] he ever saw. But the thing is there was a philosophy as well of 'just get it out there'; y'know, 'just get it out there.' So. I mean the one thing that stood out in that first – cause I started just after the Voëlvry tour in '89; and just after that we released the second album by Mzwakhe Mbuli. 'Change is Pain.' The first –

MD: Er – 'Unbroken Spirit.'

HC: 'Unbroken Spirit,' yah. 'Change is Pain' was the first one, you're right. And 'Unbroken Spirit', we sold – Mzwakhe was banned, we did a show at the Market Theatre Warehouse. And, I mean we had people, we – we paid someone to do a backdrop for us and they just disappeared with – all the material, so – Catharina Scheepers, she did all the artwork for the Voëlvry tour, she saved us, so – we did a big bla – you know like Zulu shield-type thing on, er, PVC.

But – I remember we sold almost 25,000 units just out of the office. And that's actually where I met – cause I worked closely with Vusi Mahlasela later on – but that's where I met him the first time. He was working in a textile factory in Mamelodi, in Pretoria. And I'm from Pretoria; so, I mean I used to deliver here

and there, but I mean I remember Jay Naidoo coming in, buying *huge* amounts for Sadesco [?], which was then the sports thing, y'know? So. I mean that stood out. But the Voël – on the Voëlvry tour itself, I was selling CDs – ach, [laughs] cassettes and LPs and badges and T-shirts. And they *flew*, you know. It was definitely – people wanted it, you know? So – I dunno, is there anything else you want to know? [Timecode – 00:05:48]

MD: So. Er, radio play – you – I mean when you started they were sort of having difficulties, but then you had a good period when you got...

HC: Yes

MD: ...some stuff onto radio.

HC: Er – I took over from Tanya – I can't remember Tanya's surname now; she used to go to the radio stations; er – that was

MD: Tonia Selley was it?

HC: No, not Tonia Selley, she came after me, yah. Tanya, she was – er – Tanya – she's on that Shifty calendar, her and Lloyd are on the front, in the photograph.

But er – but Tuesday was radio day at the SABC. So... I mean it was – they used to – used to give them 30 copies for the libraries, and the [?]in sample. I mean my arms were stretched down to the ground, cause it was like LPs you carry around. So – when I – the first album I worked on for Shifty was... er – 'Niemandland,' which [was] Koos Kombuis, post-Voëlvry. And we – we did strike – they [?]did like 'Lisa se Kl' – the two – the only two songs on that album that weren't banned was 'Lisa se Klavier', and 'Onder in My Whiskeyglas.' You know, so – erm – I dunno, we got airplay for 'Lisa se Klavier' on Highveld; it was Highveld then. And I know that those days the SABC offered a deal – where you could – they'd – er – it was 'Goeiemôre Suid-Afrika' or 'Good Morning South Africa', where they would pay half – of the manufacture of a video. So – I know Craig Matthews, a friend of Lloyd's – he made the 'Lisa se Klavier' video, they gave us six grand [laughs]. I mean this was 1989, yes, yah, so. I mean we did OK with that, but – I mean in terms of airplay I can say to you, at that stage, in terms of – *white* radio, because, I mean, there's no other way to put it; er – 5FM was – the place, you know? So I mean unless you had a 'Lisa se Klavier', you wouldn't – get any more luck. You know, on 5FM – *Barney Simon* would play *anything*; he was – but he was on a 24-hour contract – *ach* they could fire him at any moment. But I must say

that he played Shifty's stuff, he'd sneak it in. And the other person who sneaked stuff in was Alex Jay.

But – just before I started as well, Tananas came out, you know, so there was –
[Timecode – 00:08:35]

MD: That was big, yah.

HC: There was airplay, and it – I mean it – across the board – it – it – penetrated into the –

MD: And then Jennifer – her 'Untimely' album might have had

HC: And then it was 'Untimely' – yes. And we – I mean – I don't think we ever got as much airplay as – 'Bay of Bombay,' for 'Untimely,' but it was well-received, you know, so. But I mean it – there – there was – on all of those albums there were tracks that were *overtly* political and – whatever, but, you know by then, we – I would say things had softened, you know, and in that time as well, Warrick was busy suing the dominee for saying the – you know so we were in the news the whole time, so whenever I went to the SABC it was like [laughs] – you know, I see you're on the front page again, whatever. But I can't say – that I had any personal, people personally attacking me – y'know, or saying 'you're a – this or a that.'

MD: So what – what do you think Shifty's most important contribution to South African music was? Can you sum it up?

HC: Well first of all, I'll say, in terms of music, they recorded – and Lloyd in particular, cause – Lloyd *and* Warrick both – they – they both have a bit of a – anthropological kind of take on music. And they're always very aware of – the time and the place of it. So – definitely in terms of, firstly the music, that they recorded; y'know, it's important – to today, that kind of music, y'know, on the edges of society or on the edge of commercial – find it difficult to be recorded. But Lloyd and – Lloyd treated the artists properly. You know he gave them all their publishing back? And things like that – so... It was done properly, the recordings were done properly, you know – I mean, people always criticise, and I mean today with the technology, you listen to some of the stuff and it sounds a bit thin. But at the time, it was *quality*. And it was quality that could stand up anywhere in the world, whereas the South African market, and the – especially the Afrikaans market, but also ...the vernacular market – catered for their audience, so they didn't ever think it would – be played heard

elsewhere in the world, so the quality wasn't really a issue. They played – to the audience, y'know? And I mean we all know Ladysmith Black Mambazo was around forever – until Paul Simon, but that's what I'm talking about. There was like a – a lack of quality.

MD: Yeah.

[Timecode – 00:11:30]

HC: So firstly it's the music and secondly – of course, or equally important – was the message. You know, it was definitely getting the message out, and being brave about it, and not being – scared. Because, well like I said to you, I never had anyone overtly attack me, but I *knew* people were scared. You know, at the SABC, they were – they'd – take the Warrick Sony album from me and say –

I remember we submitted, er – 'Bigger than Jesus' – you know, what it feels like to walk in there with a album called that. But in any case, so we changed the name to...

MD: 'Beachbomb.'

HC: ...'Beachbomb.' And then, there were a couple of people there, I think Barney was one – Barney Simon was one of them that said if in 'Limpet Mine,' we take the word 'fucked up' out, they will play it. So Warrick went, he rerecorded it – there's a limited amount of those – and they still wouldn't play it, you know, so I mean I think people were just scared. But I remember at one point with all the DJs, whether it was Metro or – or the regional black stations, or whatever, I made them each a box, with all the bands' stuff in; and we had some – red tape, I think it's stuff they used to use in repro, you know in the old days when they had to do – er – proofs and things – er – posi's and that for printing. And I – wrapped the tape around it, and I wrote on it 'get through the red tape'. You know, but I never, as I said to you, no-one ever really came back – to my face. But you could sense it. You know. So –

MD: So, d'you think that there was a particular, sort of, camaraderie or spirit amongst Shifty artists as a – as a – kind of collective almost?

HC: Yes, definitely. But I mean there were – there were – ego issues, you know, I mean the thing is that – James is this *magnificent* musician; but he – he had quite a problematic character, you know? And I mean I'll probably be slain for saying it, but – he had a following of very loyal friends, who – mostly musicians – who – who could see him for the genius he was. But, I mean for instance on the Voëlvry tour he was *deeply* unhappy, about Ralph – Kerkorrel

– playing the – the main slot on the tour. You know, and it's only years later that – even André le Toit was like that – it's years later that they – realised what Ralph was exposed to, and how – that he was doing interviews 24 hours a day, that *he* was being targeted by the security police, that *he* – y'know, that sort of thing. So, but at the time, er, James could be – quite disruptive.

[Timecode – 00:14:34]

You know; and I mean I think that's one of the reasons Lloyd didn't go on the tour himself. Was cause James wanted to have the main slot. Or everyone said. But in general I could say that Shifty was very democratic. And, y'know, ironically enough, y'know, a lot of our concerts were more mixed in the 80s than they are now even. Y'know and if you look at the things that stood the test of time, it's Johnny Clegg and even Mango Groove, if you're talking A-play. So there – there was a appetite for that mixed – thing.

But er, y'know, I don't really know. I know – I mean there was a big fallout with Mzwakhe, you probably know all about that, y'know – which was unpleasant. But, er – ?big change

MD: There was – there was – he just felt that he wasn't getting enough money out of Shifty for what he was selling –

HC: Ach, he – er – there was a magazine at that stage called *Top 40*. I think they had a Afrikaans equivalent, I'm not sure. But there was a I – a girl with the editor called Tara Robb; she used to play for a band –

MD: Spectres...

HC: Spectres, yah. And Tara came to Lloyd and she showed Lloyd a interview that Mzwakhe had did – had done. D'you know that story, about the...?

MD: No...

HC: About calling Lloyd a – a cultural imperialist, and also he's not getting his money and that. So Lloyd did get a – and Shifty got an interdict and it was never published. But at the Mandela rally, when Mandela was released from prison, at FNB, at Soccer City, it was there. Lloyd was – in the stadium, he was doing the sound, and he was basically told, well Lloyd, Warrick and Shaun Naidoo, they had to leave the stadium, they were sort of threatened. So I mean he – the minute the ANC was unbanned, and – he was not scared any more, he – the power – he got *so much* power, and I don't think he knew how to handle it. Cause I mean what Lloyd did for him was – incredible – y'know, I mean, we were all in danger. I had a beetle, a little blue beetle; and I

used to drive him around with him lying on the back seat of my car, cause no-one would think this Afrikaans *meisie* will have – this terrorist on the back seat, y’know, so...

[Timecode – 00:17:05]

But also, he was also, he was a different – y’know, because the – there was a German record company that approached – or that Lloyd and Warrick were working with that said ‘we need a worker poet.’ And – that’s how Mzwakhe – they identified Mzwakhe, and then they basically put – um – Tananas behind him. So I mean that just got out of hand. But I think – we had a early warning, cause all of us saw a lot of that happening in the new South Africa once...

MD: Yeah, yeah

HC: Yeah.

MD: So then, I mean talking about Mzwakhe, er – you were then... you sort of spoke about how Lloyd sort of created that sound around him.

HC: Yah, yah.

MD: So, d’you think – I mean what d’you think the – the – the positives and negatives are that musicians have around Shifty, they – from their point of view.

HC: I think, you know, from where I sat, from where I was – not working for Shifty *and* working for Shifty, I think it was a stamp of approval – there were musicians who were *dying* to – I mean Lloyd said no to Mango Groove, you know? [laughs]

MD: Really?

HC: Cause they were not – they were pop pop pop, you know? And they were not his taste. So – and I mean that’s what you – you have to be subjective and you have to do what you like, y’know? So, I think that – erm – the negatives were you know if I think now, back, on what I know now and what I’ve learnt, we were rank amateurs; I mean we were absolutely rank amateurs. We had friends in the industry here and there, but – I mean they were sort of friendships could only go up to a point. You know.

But I think that – er – yah, I think there were lots of things that – we didn’t understand marketing properly; that’s something that someone like Dirk Uys

and Johannes Kerkorrel understood, that's why – and Andre le Toit. But it's also, you know at that time, it was the time – it was of its time, you know, so... I know the – you know there were artists that felt they didn't get enough royalties and that, but – I'm sitting here at SAMRO now, let me tell you nothing's changed [laughs]. [Timecode – 00:19:34]

MD: Yeah. So, I mean, some – some of the musicians, I suppose normally the ones who were doing quite well, they – they kind of jumped ship early, er – to other record companies – Kerkorrel, Kombuis, Tananas, er, The Genuines –

HC: No, what happened is that when – er BMG took over Tusk – cause we just had a distribution deal – so – er – they then made a deal with Lloyd that they'll let Shifty go, if they can have Tananas, Mzwakhe and Kerkorrel.

MD: Oh really?

HC: Yah. I know Kerkorrel eventually ended up with Gallo, because Deon Maas ...

MD: And Mzwakhe eventually EMI.

HC: ...Yah. But er – Keith Lister, from BMG, made those – so I – I think it was just the albums, not the artists.

MD: Yeah. OK cause I know – when I spoke to er – Mac Mackenzie, he was saying that Ian – Ian was putting pressure on them to leave Shifty – and to go with someone else, and, er – so I'm not – yeah, I don't know how that –

HC: I don't know, that's very fraught stories. Everything was fraught, we were all – I mean the securit – the – all the guys were dodging the army, you know, I mean The Genuines – Ian Herman – is a *very very* good friend of Lloyd's, and he had a lot to do with the early sound of Shifty; but he also is quite an astute businessman, you know – he – he's always seen the wood for the trees. You know, whereas I think – I mean we were quite – probably quite depressed a lot of the time, y'know. But I think we *all* were – the country was, as a whole, y'know. And I mean a lot of drinking, y'know? I mean everybody drank, a shit load. And um – and everything that comes with that. But then again, I mean, we were 20 years younger, so [laughs] the hangovers didn't last. But er – just about The Genuines, is that – er – whenever something works in the music business there will be people that try and poach it. Y'know. And I think that, for Tananas, for instance, it's a good street cred start, small. And have that out there and do your own thing, because big record companies *don't*. If you do your first album with a major, they tell you what to do – especially now.

And – so, I mean it was a good – stepping stone; cause it has all that street credibility – and – and the artistic freedom.

[Timecode – 00:22:26]

You know, so I mean I would understand if a artist that was starting to make money would say, 'let's leave Shifty' because it's about – money on, *ach*, about units on the shelf. You know that's all changed now, but that was then.

MD: Yeah, cause I mean Shifty, um, broke quite a lot of really good South African artists, I mean apart from the ones who we think are good who just remain marginal, but some that became well-known...

HC: Sakhile.[?]

MD: ...from, er, I mean the Voëlvry, the Voëlvry thing itself – er, to

HC: I'm saying Sakhile now, I mean Sankomota.

MD: Sankomota, and –

HC: That was Shifty's first album, yeah.

MD: ...and, um, Tananas, and, er – even The Genuines in a way, Vusi Mahlasela obviously, so they – um...

HC: Oh yah, Vusi. I worked – I worked very closely with Vusi in the beginning, y'know. And, er. But he was another artist, y'know, I mean Dave Matthews came out here, and he heard him – and, that was it, y'know? So... But – Vusi came via the Congress of South African writers to Shifty. They – Nadine Gordimer and them – you know, they – the Con – COSAW were – was *very* active. There was some – a guy that used to put on concerts at Vista University in Mamelodi. And – someone heard him there. I think it was – ex-diplomatic corps, or – that – the person who – I can't remember, I know it was a white guy. And – he was a teacher there, and he started doing these poetry evenings; and then someone – and the Zabalaza Festival happened in London at that time as well. And COSAW sent a lot of artists. But I mean Vusi, yah he became too big for Shifty. But I don't think that was ever Shifty's agenda.

MD: Yeah. So I mean in a way. I mean Lloyd started – when Lloyd started Shifty it was around – it was about, erm – trying to archive stuff that was going down that wasn't being recorded. And then they sort of thought, well we'd better publish, or to get it out there; and in a way that never ever became – I mean it

was never his, really, his forte, it was never his big desire; and so in a way Shifty almost were very good at discovering people, bringing out a good album that – that captured the... [Timecode – 00:24:56]

HC: The integrity of it, yah...

MD: ...yeah, that captured the – the artist, and almost in a sense set them up for something bigger without being able to really take them there.

HC: But the – I mean the recording business to this day is a filthy business, y'know, and – I mean I don't know if Lloyd's spoken to you about Mark Bennett.

MD: Yah, I know that he – he

HC: D'you know the whole story?

MD: ...he went off with a whole lot of money, but yah.

HC: Yeah.

But Mark was supposed to be doing marketing; and – well – I don't think he really knew what he was doing, but he had good friends; like Harvey Roberts, who was at EMI. Who he's still friends with, they're still in a band together today. That – um – that helped him. But it meant that he had to play a lot of golf. [laughs] Shall I say more? Or not – but I don't know.

MD: I mean did he sponsor a golf tournament or something, with Shifty money? Or... there's like different rumours going around and around about what happened but...

HC: I don't know. No, I mean he – he gave Lloyd the money back, I know that. But at the time he took the money – remember that Shifty's whole agenda also changed with the Swedish funding that came in. Every – it changed – the whole underground, completely independent way. Because they – I mean I had – d'you know who Stan James is? Stan, and his brother, I shared a – I lived downstairs in a house, they lived upstairs. And they – they – their father was friends with Herbert Shotmeyer, who used to run Jameson's in town.

MD: OK.

HC: They had a – a gambling scheme, a relate thing. So they used to sit at Sun City for two days, but they leave with money. And – you know they were all musicians, you know their older brother was a musician but he lost his arm.

MD: Yeah, Dave, yeah. [Timecode – 00:26:47]

HC: And er – they convinced, through their father, Herbert to put music on at Jameson's. And – they were – quite – I haven't seen them forever, y'know. But I remember in the beginning, Stan and, it was Alph – Alph. He told me that er – they started the whole movement at Jameson's, everything – and Lloyd was just a punk in bondage pants and he got the funding. But they also tried to get the funding and they didn't. D'you know all of that?

MD: No – not a great deal, but I know that – I mean Jameson's became a kind of platform for Shifty artists, or often where Shifty *found* artists to – to erm sign, like the Aeroplanes for example, and that, yeah. So – so were you at Shifty when they got the funding, or was that – did that come...

HC: It came before, it came before. But er not – I think the funding came '88. And – but the funding for the Voëlvry tour came – from the Canadian government.

MD: And the, and the *Vrye Weekblad* as well.

HC: As well, yah. But it was also money channelled from Canada, I think. It was Canadian money as far as I know. Because as far as I know the – I actually never really – read that agreement, even if there was one. But the arrangement between Kultuur Ouset[?]; Kultuur Ouset and Asse Yot [??00:28:26] and Shifty was more to do with recording, than performing, as far as I know. It was about product.

MD: Ok, just one, one last thing. It was when I spoke to Jennifer Ferguson quite a few years ago, she was – she described Shifty as a 'boy's club,' and I wonder what your feeling about that is, given that you were working there – erm...

HC: Ach, Jennifer was always a bit of a – a serious feminist... it was a bit of a boys' club.

MD: ...they – I mean she was the only – she was the artist – she was the only woman artist they signed, directly...

HC: There were – bands, yeah.

MD: ...There were a couple of women who were in some of the bands, but yeah. But it was...

HC: I wouldn't – say the same. Do you know Andre? I'll introduce him to you just now. [Timecode – 00:29:10]

No, I – it was probably a boys club, yah. But I mean the –

MD: In terms of the kind of atmosphere that prevailed...

HC: It was all a bit of a boys' club. You know I would say that had more to do with Mark Bennett, than with Lloyd. Lloyd has always been a loner. Lloyd and Warrick were always kinda backroom – people. Y'know, and Lloyd was – he's not a talker, y'know. Mark was the party oke, y'know, and er – he was very good friends with James, they grew up together. So that whole clan, Van and James, and – Hanepoot and all of that came – with Mark. But erm – I wouldn't say they treated women – I mean, I was treated equally. And, I mean someone like Tonia Selley always had a equal place in that whole –

MD: No I don't think Jennifer was suggesting that women were treated any differently...

HC: Yah, but she said the atmosphere, yah...

MD: ...just that it was like, kind of the atmosphere was really masculine.

HC: I dunno, I was so young, you know? I as the youngest person on that Voëlvry tour, I was 22. Actually on my 22nd birthday, was the last night of the Voëlvry tour, at – at a club here in Hillbrow, and we had a party at – the house, the – James's house, in Obs, that night. And, um. So I worked there two-and-a-half years, so I was young, you know I was very young. But – I – I can't say. You know prob – maybe if I was older, I would have taken it differently. But – they all had very *serious*, the lot of them, had very serious kind of Wits, studying, or just-graduated girlfriends, who'd keep them in their place – you know who I'm talking about [laughs]!

So I mean it was more a joke. But it was – I mean musicians to this day, it – it *is* like that. It will be like that.

MD: OK.

HC: Mm.

MD: Thanks very much.

HC: Enough.

MD: Yep.

HC: Tell you anything you didn't know?

[/ends]

