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### **Interview with Mac Mackenzie**

Emphasis in *italics*.

Michael Drewett [MD]: OK, so, erm Mac, could you talk a little bit about how you first became involved with Shifty. You know, you'd already really formed The Genuines and all that, so erm – yah.

Mac Mackenzie [MW]: OK. I was playing for various bands here in Cape Town and I was always a composer and I was always frustrated. And - but I did – I did have the luck to meet some great musicians, like Gerard O'Brien the guitar player, Hilton Schilder – and er – from here to there I'm kind of travelling through South Africa playing in various jazz bands, but always looking for – for what I wanted to do. And my friend Gerard from Port Elizabeth came to stay in Cape Town; er, he had met Hilton and was playing on the circuit there – the circuit where you play six nights a week in a hotel, and everything is [...] supper, and you're just playing, like on a ship you know? Four sets. And then I said to him, and then I said to him you can stay by me in Bridgetown, so he stayed by me, so I said 'and now I'm gonna show you all my songs'.

Because he knew I was a composer, but it was always a little bit schmaltzy jazzy, Cape Coloured scene you know? Al Jarreau, versus Stevie Wonder and er – and Chick Corea. *Good chops*, you can get good chops. But, your audience is kind of – in a separated country your audience is always coloured so they don't *really wanna* hear a new song. They want to hear an old – a cover version that – I'd say to Gerard 'I must show you all the *rock* songs I've written' – and then he had a tape recorder and he was a technique guy, and so he taped

everything; and then – I was very frustrated with – cause the beats weren't coming through, so we got a drum machine. So me and Gerard and the drum machine were having a ball; Hilton would come with his – with his brand new family and – and – and his beautiful, beautiful piano music chops –

[Timecode – 00:02:07]

would come and whenever he could get away from the – the – the humdrum of having to play for different musicians in Cape Town, and the jazz circuit and etc, *he* would come and throw in *his* sounds and so we both had quite a catalogue, and that lasted for a year. And then I said, 'you see, no-one's gonna take us seriously, now I'm going to Johannesburg. And I don't want Hilton to come with, because his wife is gonna be upset, they've got things to – g – growing up, the family. Me and Gerard we're going [snaps fingers]. With a drum machine, because there's no drummer that can play what – what I'm hearing.

Then um – I'm having trouble and I knew about about a lot of musicians and I knew about Ian Herman, but I'm too *skrik* to ask him because he's a very good drummer. So when we got to Jo'burg er – er – er – we had to sleep on the floor where people would have us – we didn't have money. And – and – er, Hilton was with us, and he was anxious to get back onto the circuit because like I said it was your buffets and *everything*, your family gets flown around, and it's a really nice life. I said Hilton please, I understand, go on the circuit, and come back – your chair is ready. And then he – bit it out for another month or something, and in that month we were – in those two months I think we were kind of playing where people would tolerate this bunch of *ous* coming, and – and when we saw it was a – a jazzy joint, we played the soft circuit stuff, but our *own* songs, always, always. And then we came across a noisy gig and then we brought in our rock songs. And Lulu Gonzana came across and another guy, Marchek Czesbo (?), a Polish guy came by, and we were looking for Ian and couldn't find Ian. But Ian was playing for a lot of bands, in Jo'burg.

And then, being a small world, we had to bump into him and then he said OK, he's gonna come over to the apartment and listen to what we have written. Put on the drum machine and played him a couple of tunes, and he started laughing – I said 'hey, *bru*, why you laughing like that?', he said '*No because I'm happy we can play!*' And then, and then two hour rehearsal and then [snaps fingers]. And then of course because he was well hooked up with people like Shifty and – and the whole scene, he knew where to lead us. So he eventually found us at Jameson's; and at Jameson's we were a hit. All the other cats were there – Aeroplanes, and the whole – James, everybody –

MD: Lurchers, and yeah

MM: *Everybody* was playing; and it was like this long weekend also – Herbert Schuckmaier said ‘you guys don’t have to go home, I want you to play another set.’ Well, we were happy, because now we had more money –

[Timecode – 00:04:49]

MD: Yeah.

MM: Every penny counted, you know. And we were also owing the *dealer* round the corner [laughs] – normal life! OK so. And then – so – so – and then that was really –

And then we heard about Shifty Records, and – I had gone to Gallo Record Company to find – to try to find a real *deal*, but they wanted us to play the *goema* music, I said ‘you know man, we’re a *rock* band. We’re gonna take your white – white *laaities* out, we’ve got the *chops* – jazz chops for the *rock* – I’m not mincing my words, I wanna...’

‘No no no no no no, you guys must play the clubs’, and I said ‘Mr – Mr Big Tie over there? Go home; I’m hungry, but I’m not gonna sign up for you to give me *my goal*.’ *My goal* is the *goema*, I’m just wanna play with the rock – and we were anti-apartheid lyrics, with the lyrics – and so it was all *relevant*, you know? And then – *ooh* – then I was so happy when I heard that Shifty Records is coming to record some stuff, yah? And then – then that’s when I – and then we did an album. And that’s how I met Shifty Records.

MD: Yeah. Ok. And um – had you – had you heard of Shifty before that?

MM: While in Cape Town?

MD: Yeah.

MM: *No!* Look I’m an – I was a coloured *boytjie* man, in a coloured band in a coloured area shouting anti-apartheid lyrics, and *all* coloured coloured coloured coloured coloured. And we needed to go *across*.

When we *did* go across I used to go stay in Gugulethu and work with Robert Sithole and – and – and – er – Roger ? and – and all that and when I came in Port Elizabeth or – or – or Jo’burg, it’s Kwa Thema, but we never really could – y’know, I saw the rock ‘n’ roll *scene*, I saw the – the – the Tribe – [slaps] Tribe after Tribe. Tribe after Tribe, playing at, at...

MD: Robbie Rob

MM: Yes, playing at um – University of Cape Town – how I got there was because we had a bunch of white friends, and girlfriends and stuff like that. Because of being creative musically, I had to go and mix with people who *understood* what creativity with music is. [Timecode – 00:07:02]

And I played for the *great, great* coloured bands, they didn't wanna. So I ended up playing with Nick Carter, and – and people like that, and – and – and... In bands that were now half-white, half-coloured; and so I – I was at home. Because, just because I could say 'I've got *this* piece, I've got *that* piece', and everybody said 'I've got this piece, that piece.' And then I was taken to er University of Cape Town, by my one white girlfriend. And she said 'you have to come and see Robbie Rob,' so.

And when I saw them I was laughing – it was *nice*, everybody was like – it was so hip. And I was like 'ooh, I can't wait to get my hand on *that* pie.' Because I know I can hear *every* chord they're doing, and I think – I'm a little bit advanced. Or, I've got more tools in my bag. Because they again were suffering because they had not – rolled over to the jazz side. And so we were just in that ha – *fortunate* place, d'you know what I mean?

MD: Mm. Yeah. And once you er signed – or worked with Shifty, what was your experience at Shifty like?



MM: Well, we were a *hit*. We were a hit, we – we – we were completely *in* character, *crossing* borders. We got into the SABC to talk to Karl Kikillus on TV. Er, er, er – I think they also thought that Shifty was a little bit Shifty, or fringe – fringe, and – these are 'End Conscription' cats, and eh, so they didn't meld with us, but we kind of *crossed* across there. And... we came from the background of the Rockets and the jazz bands, and the Mankunkus, but there we were, a rock and roll band on television. So with Shifty, we became a *big* hit, and – it shaped our lives, er – In a very positive way. Because then, I could bring my dad up to make an album called 'Mr Mac and The Genuines', and that was banjo and the *goema* – and –

And then Tony Cedras came back from America to visit and then Robbie Jansen could – and then they could add the horns. And it was just *super super*.

And of course now you know you you you – at that stage you're young, you're militant, and it's a militant country, it's a militant everything, and I want a million bucks now, so I'm starting to think that Shifty is short-changing me, and I think everybody goes through that. So we er – wanting to further the horizons, we had

also then been to *Amsterdam*, through Shifty, because now we were the anti-apartheid band that could sing loud –

MD: Yeah, that – that CASA –

[Timecode – 00:09:39]

MM: CASA... And we were topping the bill that night, and we were the *loudest* band and we were the crossover band – we were – we were jazz, *goema*, *mbaqanga*, we were – we were *bruin ous*, we were haughties – and so we were just – like – *magic*. And had we not made that album, or had I not gone to Jo'burg, or had I not been a composer. So all those things worked as 'Cometh the man cometh the hour', you know?

And then er – our relationship er – had a speed bump when we went to *Durban*. We were struggling in Durban. Still on The Genuines; but Durban was – just like Joburg but short of cash, and – we were – it was a little bit, a *little* bit...

And we were also wanting to *move* – we had tasted Europe, I had tasted Europe, 'hey come on I can't *believe* you're not hooking us up with Annie Lennox, or' – saying 'we've got the flagship of South African music' – of course, I'm pumped up – 'we've got the jewel in the crown – throw them – *throw us at them!* I can't wait to get my hands around their throat.' 'Ah, you've gotta be pedantic, you've gotta be, like' – 'there's *order*.' And so when we were in Durban, I phoned Lloyd and I said 'Listen, Lloyd let's just forget about making more albums,' and he said 'ahhh, what?'. We're all disappointed, finished my dad's album. And then – [snaps] we also got a – a three-month tour to Germany. So we went to Germany in their winter.

Er, the Wall was still up. But we were in Munchen, and then erm – there we went, er – then we left that promoter, again such a fight. You know? We were now highly test – just testosteronic, I mean you can imagine. All – all my superstars that I had, all my idols in my mind I thought 'You must hear *us*, because we've got the best chops in town, we play fast, we play lovely chords, and we can, we can wanna wanna wanna.' But then we went to Berlin, and from Berlin Ian went to America and joined Tananas coming back, and Hilton and myself and Gerard came back.

So – that's the effect Shifty had on us, and – and then after that – breaking that relationship I came *back* with an album from – from, um, from Holland. 'Cause after Germany and coming back I went back to Holland, got to deal with another record company there, Provogue. Did a *crazy* album, and um – a rock album; and came back and gave Warrick the album for Lloyd and Warrick to listen to;

for – for the distribution here. They weren't – er, er – in the mood for doing it, but we were friends again.

[Timecode 00:12:33]

Because we had overcome that – that little *speed bump*. And then of course I worked with Lloyd on a lot of other stuff.

Um. Yeah, things were difficult then in South Africa – they still are a bit, but with er – distribution, it was with – there were very few companies that distributed and things like that.

MD: So, given all those problems, d'you think Shifty did enough for you, or as much as they could? Or d'you think they could have done more?

MM: No, I think everything went – went just perfect; when I look back it and I think to myself 'what a bloody nice life I've had'. And – and – and all the human things that can happen in our frailties with misunderstanding, misconception. Always short of cash, thinking there should be er – more cash. But of course now I know that is not the case. You can be on TV a thousand times, it doesn't mean you've got any money.

MD: Yeah.



MM: And so. That. I'm a very fortunate person, you know? I work very hard, but I can still say... that... There's *no* – way of, er, quantifying what – what Shifty eventually meant. Because – it sounds like I'm trying to butter somebody, or – or pu – pull honey through their mouth. But – but – but really, in a – I mean I met, I met – and came across, and also learned how Europe works, because I could go back and forth; and – and when I went back to Holland, after the German thing, I took my two Shifty albums, at that time we didn't have CDs. I took my newspaper cuttings, and everybody gave me a chance – in Holland – to – to put my band on stage. And we went on stage, they *liked* it, and so it became – the same Shifty experience, but on a bigger – on a more *populated* thing, I would say, I wouldn't say *bigger*, just more popu – just more people, and more – more places to go, and a kind of different *machine*.

And so, I learned very quickly how Europe works, and then I could go – I go to Europe once a year; I can go almost at will. Into any unknown place, I know how it works, and – the only thing you have to do in Europe is work hard.

MD: Yeah, yeah.

MM: And don't think that somebody's going to throw bucks at you unless you're working hard, you know?

MD: And then, um, when you signed with Shifty, did they give you any directives? Or were you free to do your own thing...

[Timecode – 00:15:11]

MM: No, we – we – we – we signed – I can't even remember, I'm bad with that. I just sign! [laughs] I just signed – I just know that my name was behind the songs that I wrote, and Hilton's two songs was behind – his name was behind that. And then I had to obviously start giving SAMRO my music; and then I had to start learning how to write my music. Because at least you didn't have to write the whole song – you had to write, like, eight bars, and something of the chorus. And then I could submit it, and I got royalties. I got [slaps hand] at 55, I'm 62 now, at 55 I got a royalty – a cheque, a retirement cheque for 20,000 rand. And when I die Shifty buries me. I dunno if they're gonna provide cows for the – for the non-believers [laughs], but I mean there's a 10,000 rand cheque for when I die. So people don't have to stress about this pauper being chucked down the road there, you know?

MD: Is that SAMRO?

MM: SAMRO – but that all came because of *that* move, you know?



MD: Yeah, yeah. So if we turn to – away from your experience and look at Shifty in general, what do you – er – think the most important aspect of Shifty's legacy would be? If there's a legacy we can talk about.

MM: Well, they did – they – I don't know if it was premeditatedly clever, or if it was actually part that's the way these people walk and talk. And they – they talk the walk and they walk the talk. They were – they were End Conscription, they were liberals, they were – they were thinkers. And they didn't – look like Gallo, or Parlophone, or... They were Shifty in a caravan, recording, looking like it's going nowhere. When you look at the *grandoise* [sic] Gallo Africa building, you think 'What is this? What is this *ou* doing here with this caravan?' 'No I'm not even interested,' yknow? – And then lo and behold and we pulled in and we heard the sound afterwards, we were '*whaaat*'s happening!' So I think the legacy is – be yourself. Even if it's going a little bit difficult. That's why I can run an orchestra today, and I don't care what – er – As long as I'm being myself as much as I think I can *try* to, then whatever is out there that's [...] to meet me – will meet. So. So today everybody – is in *great* admiration of Shifty. And – look they, er – and – I don't think I'll get the words to say it, but what a great thing, and now they're sitting with the best, from Mzwakhe through to Vusi Mahlasela, through

to James – Philips, through – through [...] Voëlvry; well-respected all over the world, a documentary or two, Lloyd goes into film and they – [slaps].

And the crossing over again, they did another one called the – *The Golden Fez, The Silver Fez?* That's – also an award-winning documentary. *Again* crossing over into the *other* world. [Timecode – 00:18:32]

I think that's the nature – and – er – I met such people because I'm such a people.

MD: And so you don't think that – a lot of that music would have been recorded without Shifty?

MM: Certainly not.

MD: Like you? Your... Genuines?

MM: No, no. *Ne-ver*.

MD: Not in the form it was...

MM: Not in South Africa, eh? Come on these guys, these guys are just more concerned about the breakfast tray. They don't even think. I mean I – I've got little time for them, because they... And I'm writing for orchestra now, and once again I have to go to Europe to find a philanthropist, and. Because you need a couple of thousand whatever, converted into rands you can breathe life into such a project for about two years, and then you must go look again, but – um – I don't think that er Gallo Records would ever entertain recording the music I write, or the kind of noise that I like to make, you know?

MD: Yeah. And then – the last question I wanted to ask is – did you feel you were part of a camaraderie at Shifty with – with the other people in the label? Did it feel like more than just you.

MM: Yah, they – it – it came through in bursts because most of the time – we were still – I wasn't going to too many birthday parties of kids and stuff like that because my family life was in Cape Town. And so, it was in the apartment where I'm living with my girlfriend or – whatever. And then we'd go to the farm over the top and run around naked for a week, and take acid and stuff, you know like and... And that was it – it was fun times, and – but I – I didn't build up a business camaraderie, I still don't do that. Um. But – in – in our *differentness* to the rest of South Africa, we did feel that we er – er – we could go to one another and ask for s – for help.



And when I got into – to Holland, unprotected, with just two albums and a couple of newspaper cuttings, one of my *chommies* here could hook me up with somebody who was running away from the army, living in Amsterdam,

[Timecode – 00:20:50]

and so I then could get a place to stay for a month while I was running around looking for gigs. You know? So that – that's kind of how – but, yah – but we weren't *project* driven, we were – we were – we were happy – happy hippies – that that happened in South Africa, you know?

MD: Making music.

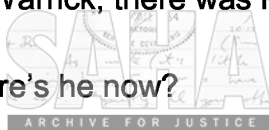
MM: Making music. Simple.

MD: And – and Shifty took that and they allowed you to do it, so that, yeah –

MM: Completely, I mean ahm – I think it was only LI – but there was another guy with him, what was his name?

MD: There was Lloyd, there was Warrick, there was Mark Bennett.

MM: *Mark* Bennett, yah. Yah, where's he now?



MD: He's around.

MM: Yah. And Mark. And – *that's* the move they are[?]. Nah nah nah, those guys, they were responsible for [laughs] – they were the best political party, if you wanted to vote for anybody, you know?

MD: Yeah. OK, well that's it.

MM: That's it? You happy?

MD: Yep. Thanks

MM: Pleasure.

[/ends]

