



“Bridge the chasms that divide” – 30 years since the fall of apartheid in South Africa

The time for the healing of the wounds has come.

The moment to bridge the chasms that divide us has come. The time to build is upon us.

—Nelson Mandela, Presidential inauguration, 10th May 1994

Thirty years later, President Mandela’s words ring as true as when he spoke them at his inauguration as South Africa’s new president, following the country’s first free and fair elections in April 1994.

A sense of shared cultures has been central to the process of reconciliation and healing in post-apartheid South Africa, and the ideal of a “rainbow nation” has been a lasting inspiration to the global community.

The Signum Quartet celebrates this “glorious human achievement” and the conflicts contained therein by inviting some of South Africa’s most original and powerful voices to reflect on their own experiences and journeys before and after 1994, weaving a rich musical tapestry as diverse as the country itself.

Never, never and never again shall it be that this beautiful land will again experience the oppression of one by another and suffer the indignity of being the skunk of the world. Let freedom reign.

The sun shall never set on so glorious a human achievement! God bless Africa!

The Signum Quartet has asked the following composers to contribute to “bridge the chasms that divide”:

Abel Selaocoe

Thandi Ntuli

Neo Muyanga

Denise Onen

Lise Morrison

Njabulo Phungula

Monthati Masebe

Dizu Plaatjies together with Matthijs van Dijk

The first part of the project will take place in Bremen as part of SIGNUM open space. Two of the composers will be in attendance: Dizu Plaatjies, a professor at the University of Cape Town and specialises in traditional African music, and Neo Muyanga from Soweto. This visit will focus on public rehearsals, a workshop/ lecture, and a concluding concert in Bremen. The composers' lecture will not only deal with aspects of musical style, but will also shed light on the historical background to apartheid and its impact on life as a black composer in South Africa today. Dizu Plaatjies will also perform some of his compositions on traditional South African instruments.

On South African Freedom Day, 27 April 2024, exactly 30 years to the day after the first free and fair elections took place, this first part of the project will conclude with a concert at the Kulturkirche St. Stephani. Three of the commissioned compositions will be framed by Joseph Haydn's "Lark Quartet" and the String Quartet in F major op 41 No. 2 by Robert Schumann.

The second part of the project will stretch from September to December 2024. This will include the premieres of the further compositions at the Boulezaal in Berlin and at the Kölner Philharmonie, as well as a tour of South Africa and a recording of an album of the works at the Sendesaal in Bremen.

Project Goals

Racism, anti-Semitism, marginalisation and the discrimination of minorities are more topical than ever and are once again all too prevalent. Not to mention that the various branches of art have are being misused for (hate) propaganda.

The musicians of the Signum Quartet want to draw attention to the abuses of the past and present. It is a matter close to their hearts to hear the stories of composers who themselves suffered under the apartheid regime and to share them with their audiences in Bremen and around the world in a musical way. The four musicians see it as part of their artistic identity to address social issues and socio-cultural questions in concerts, here in relation to South Africa's history, and in general. They want to use their own means to sensitise their audience to these issues. The new and/or previously rarely heard sound language is an important point of contact that helps to open up to the unfamiliar and create new (listening) experiences.

The main idealistic goals of the project are to recall the history of South Africa to people's minds on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the end of apartheid and thus set an example. In addition, the quartet would like to focus on the diversity of South African music culture and contribute to the dissemination of this cultural wealth. It sees music as an ambassador and bridge builder between the present and the past, between habit and rediscovery.
