



Tiisetso Makube
THIS ART CALLED
JAZZ

GOOD TIMES, GOOD TIDINGS

It was the perfect start to the weekend. First, a long awaited and much appreciated letter from Europe landed on my lap, and then a jubilant friend called to say that his long awaited book in which I have been modestly, but honourably, mentioned, had finally been published and could we go out and celebrate?

If, as Es'kia Mphahlele says, misery walks in a queue, then good tidings also do. No sooner had I spoken to my elated friend than I got wind that Will Calhoun, the American drummer, was not only in town, but would be sitting in with some of our finest players at Nikki's Oasis in Newtown, Johannesburg.

And so off to Nikki's we went last Friday. That we would have a great time, since we were celebrating my friend's achievement, was in no doubt.

And there was the music. Brother Calhoun, you see, is known in some circles as a hard rock drummer. He has received Grammy awards for Best Hard Rock Performance.

He has played and recorded with rappers, for God's sake, such as Run-DMC and Public Enemy.

But he has also worked with the masters BB King, Jaco Pastorius, Jack DeJohnette and Pharoah Sanders, to name a few.

But, what to expect was my concern.

Yes, good tidings can also walk in a queue. There, on the night, was the beautiful Zim Ngqawana.

And so they began, Ngqawana on alto sax, Andile Yenana on piano, Herbie Tsoaeli on upright bass and our honoured guest on drums.

Morabo Mojele was also there, though he did not get to play. It hardly mattered. Calhoun was in his element; he was fearsome, smoking, on fire, and dangerous and beautiful, and on a mission to delight.

Tsoaeli later said about Calhoun, as we were having our libations: "I think the guy was testing us. He was trying to gauge us, to see how good we really are, and we were all up



DRUM BEAT:
Will Calhoun

to the challenge. Andile played some mean solos. In the end we had fun. The music was excellent."

My sentiments exactly. Calhoun's too, because he was effusive with praise for both Yenana and Tsoaeli.

Finding it hard to resist the urge though, I found myself asking Calhoun: "But brother what are you doing messing around with rappers and rockers when you could just concentrate on jazz?"

His expected response was that he was a musician's musician.

He went on to explain, though: "Jazz is the truest, the highest, art form".

The music of John Coltrane, he said, is the music of the future.

Elvin Jones, who was the first drummer Calhoun listened to and fell in love with, is heady and bewitching and beautiful, he said.

I have been listening to Calhoun's latest album, *Native Lands*, and what I have to say about it, writer Quincy Troupe has already articulated eloquently.

In Troupe's words, Calhoun's music takes us to a "sweet well to drink nourishing music (that) soothes us, quenches our thirst, wires us into (his) musical travels, loops us back to where it all started from, where music has to go".

Are you art as continuum, Calhoun?