



Serenading ghosts

Text **Ron Swilling**
Photographs **Dan & Brenda Shout**

The unruly south-westerly wind died down. There was drop-a-pin silence in the old ghost town. The golden afternoon light cast its warmth over the sand piled up in corners, doorways and passageways, lending a rich lustre to pastel shades, peeling paint and door handles. The stark Namib Desert glowed like a pirate's treasure in the deserted diamond town of Kolmanskop. Shadows fell and then merged with the approaching darkness as if they were turning in for a night of peaceful slumber.

We checked our musical instruments one final time on the stage of the rambling territory. His childhood was spent playing on sand dunes amidst the

eventually told him that if he wanted to play music, he should learn to do it properly, and sent him off for classical recorder lessons. These led him to playing the clarinet, and eventually his chosen instrument, the saxophone. He has never looked back since, or returned to playing the guitar.

A few weeks after graduating at UCT Dan received a telephone call to audition for the band of well-known South African artist, Johnny Clegg.

It would take many more years of practising and gaining experience before he met up with the rest of the SHOUT band members, and for the group to record its album in the desert sands. Like all children from the small mining town, Dan went to boarding school when he reached high-school age. He chose SACS (South African College High School) in Newlands Cape Town, a school known for its excellence in musical tuition, and situated close to where his grandparents lived. He soon joined the concert and marching bands, and his mother bought him his first saxophone, enabling him to play in the jazz band.

He matriculated at SACS and went on to study music at the University of Cape Town (UCT). After a year of studying classical clarinet, he switched to – and fell hopelessly in love with – jazz. He began to play in UCT ensembles, and with house DJs and artists around the city. After graduation he taught full-time for a year and a half, and then returned to complete his masters' degree in jazz performance. It was

after graduation that he received a telephone call to audition for the band of well-known South African artist, Johnny Clegg. This was seven years ago and Dan has since catapulted himself into the international arena.

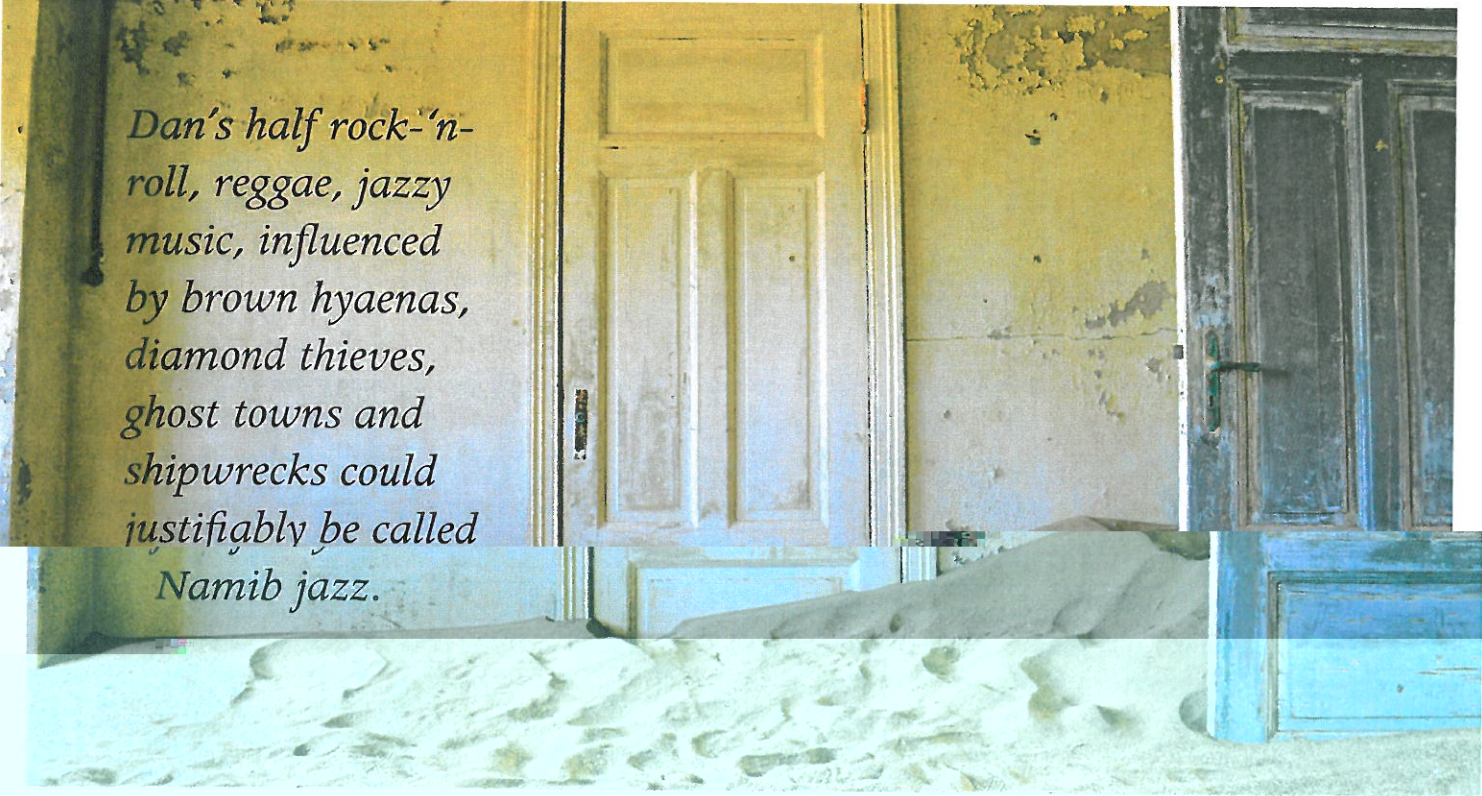
His week is now jam-packed. He divides his time between playing a variety of music for different bands, from Johnny Clegg's Zulu rock 'n roll to swing, acid jazz and original jazz; running the Shout Music Company, an agency arranging music for weddings, events and restaurants; and teaching and lecturing at UCT. And he makes time, importantly, for his dreams.

The band SHOUT comprises Dan Shout on sax, Gorm Helfjord on guitar, Romy Brauteseth on double



Filr Gorm Helfjord (guitar), Romy Brauteseth (double bass), Dan Shout (saxophone), Jonno Sweetman (drums) and sound engineer, Myles McDonald

bass and Jonno Sweetman on drums. They took to the stage in the abandoned town hall of Kolmanskop to play their repertoire of (mostly) original jazz-fusion tunes. Inspired by the extraordinary venue, they performed numbers arranged by Dan, with names such as *Bogenfels*, *Strandwolf* and *Cops 'n Robbers* evocative of the surrounding Namib Desert, its desolate coastline and its mining history.



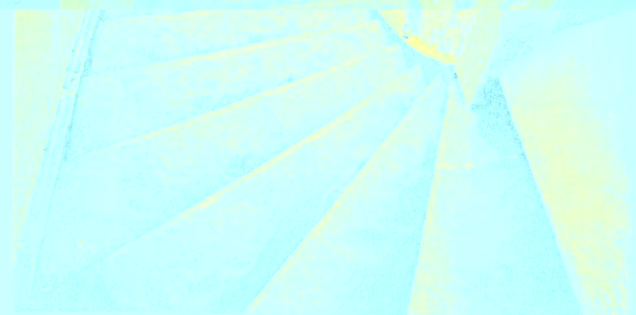
Dan's half rock-'n-roll, reggae, jazzy music, influenced by brown hyaenas, diamond thieves, ghost towns and shipwrecks could justifiably be called Namib jazz.

According to Dan, *Cops 'n Robbers* is about 'the 24-hour 365-day cat-and-mouse game that takes place in the big sand pit of the Sperrgebiet between the people trying to steal diamonds and those trying to stop them'. In *Bogenfels*, the name of the striking rock arch on the coast, they recreate the sounds of the ghost town at night, while in *Strandwolf* (Afrikaans for 'beach wolf'), they convey the life of the resilient desert-dwelling brown hyena that survives in the  conditions

of the Namib Desert.

When asked about the kind of music contained in the album, Dan tries to define it as jazz-fusion, but shies away from the 80s idea of jazz-fusion with synthesisers and electric guitars. "It has evolved a lot since then," says Dan. He adds that it is fused with music from all over the world – from North Africa and South America to Australia. And although he draws influences from reggae, heavy metal, jazz and African music, it's always his aim to be original.

Dan says philosophically that while we spend most of our time when we're growing up trying to be like everyone else, there comes a time to express yourself by finding your own voice, which in his case was his own style of music. For a Namibian west coast boy, this was going back to the part of the world where he grew up, surrounded by and loving the Namib Desert. In a sense this half rock-'n-roll, reggae, jazzy music, influenced



by brown hyaenas, diamond thieves, ghost towns and shipwrecks, could justifiably be called Namib jazz.

Combining dreams, love and music in the strangest and most appropriate of venues – the deserted diamond-mining town of Kolmanskop – the SHOUT band members lifted up their instruments and played their desert repertoire. They played through the night, through the twilight hours and into the dawn, entertaining future album listeners – and... serenading ghosts. www.danshout.co.za