

# THE COLOURFUL WORLD OF WOUTER KELLERMAN

Interview **Iliska Crossley** Pictures **Wouter Kellerman**

Wouter Kellerman exudes the serene air of a yoga master. His smile is open and inviting, and he comes across as infinitely amicable and approachable. But this quiet exterior belies a tremendous energy and tenacity that lies just beneath the surface.

**S**peaking to Wouter it soon becomes clear that he has had to face more than his fair share of difficulties whilst pursuing his musical dreams, especially recently when recording his debut album *Colour*. But in refusing to get sidetracked, he seems to have developed a knack for making the impossible possible; persisting when many others would have fallen by the wayside.

Who else in South Africa can boast that their album has been mixed by one of the world's top sound engineers – Husky Hoskulds? This LA-based engineer earned his second GRAMMY for wrapping the Norah Jones albums in that certain intimate warmth that helped make her a household name, and the mere fact that Hoskulds agreed to work on Wouter's album immediately endorses the quality of the musical content.

Needless to say, *Colour* also embraces a resonant sound world that lets all the musical elements shine through with clarity and warmth. Every aspect of the album speaks of an acute attention to detail –





from the sophisticated packaging and superb design work, right through to the recording and production. Whereas in the past it has sometimes sadly been too easy to pick out a South African product in terms of its production quality, this album certainly raises the bar, signalling that as South Africans we no longer are willing to accept second best and are ready to compete with the best internationally.

Although Wouter is a well-known award-winning classical flautist, he has decided to highlight another side of his musical personality on his debut album, one which embraces a more inclusive crossover soundworld. On the album he musically flirts with the flavours of Latin America, ropes in the rhythmic world of South Africa, borrows improvisatory elements from jazz, while firmly anchoring these influences in his classical and acoustical roots. As the title of the album suggests, it is simply a feast of colourful sounds and styles, enhanced through the use of a variety of flutes, including the alto flute and fife.

Wouter explains that his love affair with music started at the age of 10 when his parents took him to an orchestral concert to guide him in choosing an instrument to play. 'My brother chose the clarinet. I reasoned that as both the oboe and bassoon are held vertically, the flute had to be special as it was held horizontally, and I therefore picked the flute!' After his parents

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purchased a flute so that he could commence with lessons, his teacher suddenly fell ill, but as he didn't know how to put the flute together yet, he was not allowed to touch the instrument. 'Every day for three weeks I would open the box and stare at the instrument,' he remembers. When the day of his first lesson arrived, he had built up so much enthusiasm and anticipation that he immediately fell into practicing a couple of hours a day.

Making swift progress, Wouter appeared with the Johannesburg Symphony Orchestra as a soloist, won the first prize in the RAU talent festival, and was a member of the SABC Junior Orchestra, touring with them to South America. He was also the principal flautist of the National Youth Orchestra.

His dream of continuing his musical studies was temporarily placed on the backburner when a full scholarship allowed him to study towards an engineering degree. But he remembers that he only lasted a month in his first job. 'When I started working I

was sent down a charcoal mine, where I worked in the darkness and dust.' He decided to join the Medical Orchestra instead, which would allow him optimum time to practice, and started an engineering business on the side. No wonder colours have become so important!

This resourcefulness and inventiveness is a characteristic that has helped pull Wouter through many a troubled time. The musician never lost sight of his dream to study abroad, and self-financed an extensive series of masterclasses with many of the world's leading flute teachers, including William Bennett, Peter Lukas Graf, Trevor Wye, Julius Baker and Susan Milan. Entering a number of competitions, he was awarded the Perrenoud-Foundation Prize at the Vienna International Music Competition in 1997.

Wouter explains that studying with such a variety of teachers has allowed him to explore the many different tonal colours that can be drawn from the flute. From the beautiful French school of playing, to flutter tonguing and singing into the flute, Wouter has harnessed all these techniques to showcase the flute as a multi-dimensional instrument on his album – yet another reference to the album title *Colour*.

The majority of the compositions on the album are originals composed by Wouter and Paul Whellock, as well as collaborative compositions featuring personnel like David Matamela, Salome Sechele, Phresh Makhane and Mauritz Lotz. Wouter explains that the material grew very organically over a number of years when he started jamming with his yoga teacher and guitarist friend Paul Whellock. And who would have thought that Wouter is mad keen on dancing? In fact, it was Wouter's contemporary dance lessons with David Matamela of *African Footprint* fame (and also an able musician) that spurred the creation of a select number of tracks on the album.

But while the compositions fell into place quite easily, the recording and release of the album was nothing if not a somewhat bumpy ride. As producing a quality sound has always stood at the core of Wouter's musical philosophy, this was an element on which he was unwilling to compromise. Thus started a long process of finding the right technical equipment that would capture a realistic sound of the flute, and eventually he was compelled to send the album to a number of engineers to be mastered and mixed.

His efforts have not been in vain and the album is a beautiful journey through a rainbow of emotions and colours. Astor Piazzolla's 'Vuelvo al Sur' draws you into the seductive world of Latin American rhythms, while African flavours abound in tracks like 'Khokho', and 'Al lê die Berge' harkens back to his Afrikaans roots. Also included are a selection of evocative tracks including 'Na die Rëen' and 'Wind'. Throughout the sound of the flute has a beautiful presence, imbued with a warmth and beauty of tone. This, after all, was the colour he wanted to communicate best of all. **CF**



