



WOUTER KELLERMAN

South Africa's
killer flautist

The isiZulu and Sesotho-speakers of South Africa have a fascinating and unique saying when one is doing something that they really like, especially when it comes to music. They say *Uyangibulala!* in isiZulu, or *Wa Mpolaya* in Sesotho, literally meaning "you are killing me"! That is exactly what I said when I heard the music of Wouter Kellerman for the first time. It was the song "Vuelvo al Sur" that killed me. Kellerman's soothing flute, along with Veronique Lalouette's caressing voice, combined to make this song one of the

highlights of *Colour*, Kellerman's debut album released in 2007. Ever since then the song has been the listeners' favourite on my radio show. The other killers in this album are "Half Moon", "Buenos Aires", "Quisas, Quisas, Quisas", "Na Die Reën" and "Al Lê Die Berge Nog So Blou".

Curiously though, Wouter Kellerman didn't use both his names on his first album, preferring to be known simply as Kellerman. I couldn't help but ask him about this in my first interview with him, and he told me that people tended

to associate him with another Wouter, a notorious scientist who succeeded in poisoning quite a number of people during South Africa's terrible past.

In his second album, *Two Voices*, he decided he was not going to allow the other guy a monopoly on this name and so he went the whole hog and decided to call himself Wouter Kellerman. It also shows that Kellerman is slowly shedding his shy persona. "I remember when I auditioned for a junior orchestra for the first time I was very nervous and played really badly," he said in an interview with journalist Katy Alexander in January last year. "The flute is very tricky to play when you are nervous – you need a steady breath and steady hands."

Usually classically trained musicians tend to play the kind of music that appeals only to those with a love for classical music. That is not the case with Wouter Kellerman. Both his albums show that here is a young South African who wants to play the kind of music that the whole world will love. He has played in Australia, China, Argentina, the USA, France, and at the closing ceremony of the 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup™.

So how did he come to play such universal music? "When I was a child, the lady that my mum left me with when she went to work used to play African music all day long," he told me over the phone. "That is how my love for all things African started. Then I did classical music from the age of 10 and later I went overseas for master classes. Much later my parents sent me to the Mediterranean and I was exposed to Latin music. But then all my friends enjoyed pop music. When I started travelling, I went to Buenos Aires. All these influences come together when I write my music. You don't think of where it comes from. You just create, and somehow all these influences make a contribution."

I couldn't agree more. Kellerman's second offering, *Two Voices*, continues

to showcase his love affair with the music of the world, with emphasis on Africa this time. His collaboration with Senegalese singer and guitarist Lamine Sonko on "N'Jarinu Garab", "Samami" and "Miniamba" shows Kellerman's desire to reach out to the rest of the African continent. South African music is not ignored, either.

The classic "Mama Tembu" is given a reggae makeover here. Other South African songs like "Cape Flats", "Mzansi" and "Sylvia" give credence to the saying that local is *lekker* (nice). But by including Astor Piazzola's "Contrabajissimo" Kellerman reminds us that he still wants to embrace the entire globe.

But, as the saying goes, there is no place like home. "What is still inspiring for me is when I get back to South Africa," he continued to tell me. "Even the way people talk in South Africa, every sentence is full of feeling and melody. That does not happen much in the Western world. Music and expression are part of the daily life in South Africa. Also, we have different cultures here and that to me is very inspiring."

If ever South Africa needed a cultural ambassador, Wouter Kellerman would be the perfect candidate. Not only is he an exceptionally talented musician, as evidenced by his winning the 2010 SAMA (South African Music Award) for Best Jazz/Instrumental/Popular Classical DVD, but a caring human being as well. He sponsored the living expenses of 10 children in the SOS Children's Village in Ennerdale, south of Johannesburg. He also continues to facilitate the teaching of young dance and music students.

In a world that is becoming more and more self-absorbed, such philanthropy is rare and commendable. No, they don't make musicians like Wouter Kellerman anymore! Wouter, as the amaZulu and the Basotho are wont to say, keep killing us with your music! 🎷