

**REPORT ON: UIA 2014 DURBAN SOCIAL/CULTURAL PROGRAMME  
A JOINT SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE AND STUDENT COMMITTEE COLLABORATION**

**UIA 2014 DURBAN PERFORMANCE ARTIST BY MANELIS**

My name is Mzwandile MANELIS Ntsele, I was born in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal in a township named KwaMashu.

Currently I am working on a project titled Aircuts, Township Jupiter is one of the tunes in this project. This song is largely about the imaginary concept of starting over in a new world. If we had a chance to climb into a rocket to start over in another planet, what would we take with us and what would we leave behind. Would we make a fresh start with trial and errors? This is also a fitting metaphor to the South Africa's pre- and post 1994, into the now. In this instance, democracy would be the transportation, the rocket to the future, which is the now. As citizens, there are a lot of positives and negatives that we've gone through to get to where we will be. Township Jupiter is very elaborative with visions of a planet where swiping a card in the Tuck/Spaza-shop (informal shop that you find all over townships) is not a strange exercise and catching a flight at the bus stop to fly down the street is the norm.

Basically those are projections to the infinite possibilities you will find when you decide to go to OTHERWHERE. Outside ones comfort zone in a place larger than the place you currently inhabit. Our country finally accepted its diversity in 1994, grew much bigger in spirit and in the literal sense. Durban is in that very place at this very moment with the pending developments of the city.

**As South Africa continues to integrate into a globalized idea of modernity are our cities still the mode of transport to get to that place? People come to the city for work or to make these spaces home amongst many other reasons. Is all we were and all we are included in the grand scheme to get to that "Jupiter" or OTHERWHERE in our lives? I certainly hope the proverbial rocket is firing in all engines.**

I have to dig deep into my past to give you the background of my arts...

I was born in a time when this part of the province use to be called just Natal and the Durban City Business District (CBD) was that place where one had to dress up to go to: young or old. The amount and types of backgrounds from people that occupy the spaces now makes the CBD a very different landscape from what it was when I was younger.

I am what can be called an urban Zulu, to put it shortly, born and raised around the city, but with some awareness on tribal tradition and customs. The amount of awareness of an individual will not only depend on someone's interest, but also on the connectivity with that family's ancestry and their rural homestead. My first artistic recollection, besides family gatherings with traditional dancing and feasting, is ironically break-dancing. Straight from the television in the mid 80's we saw Beat Street (A film about Hip-Hop dancing in New York). It was a strange dance, not to many could do it, but it just became easy when I tried it.

My dance moves happened against a backdrop of heightened violent protests that were meant to make the country ungovernable. The backlash would be against the raids and the tortures in police cells. Parents who had means to send their kids to remote schools, far away from the black townships, quickly did.

So it happened that the one day I am playing with my friends: dancing, watching big army trucks march up and down the streets and I am having school stay ways because of constant strikes, just enjoying the benefits of being a kid from my background. The next day I am in boarding school looking at new faces and new tribal accents, without television, but with nuns and a lot of church visits, since it was a Catholic Mission School hidden between the South Coast of the Province and the mountains of the Eastern Cape. Somehow even then I had always involved myself in performance in one way or the other. Dancing, church choir or some theatrical sketch when the Archbishop comes for visits.

When I went to High School in Pietermaritzburg I came to realize and recognize my artistic abilities. I got introduced to theatre performance, which consequently propelled my interest in creative writing.

The nature of the content I wrote was naturally politically driven, since the arts were all for the **“cause”**. This is when I actually got to know what was happening politically, actually making sense of why death was a reoccurring event back home. I got to know about Steve Biko, Mandela and other prisoners.

*“We want freedom/ Equal Rights/ Free our Leaders”* were thee slogans echoing from the corridors of the mind and the streets. Censorship did not allow musicians at the time to freely express themselves about politics. So in a boarding closed in environment, we could vent about political injustice, while outside the walls of the school, the country was slowly changing: the first wave of political prisoners was being released. After Nelson Mandela got released, it was like a tidal wave: a whole lot changed.

In 1992 I was back in Durban in a multi-racial school where I shared my class with students came from backgrounds I couldn't have imagined before. It was a huge culture shock for me, just like for many others from my background around the country. The levels of education were worlds apart. I could not pursue theatre seriously since there were no opportunities and even when I did pass auditions I couldn't drop out of school so inevitably I stopped practicing theatre. I could hear, understand and enjoy artists like Public Enemy, Technotronic, Heavy D and the Fresh Prince and since I was writing a lot I automatically gravitated towards rap and Hip Hop, it was radical enough too.

Kwaito was a brand new bouncing baby genre bubbling around that time, it is South Africa's version of house music with a slowed down tempo and innovative bass lines that have very African rhythmic arrangements in them. The genre was very much about partying and dancing to the sounds of newfound freedoms. The beats were infectious and hard thumping, but not very lyrical, besides chanting around the euphoria of the party scene, male bravado and maybe a few songs that had a socially conscious subject matter.

I honestly didn't gravitate towards that vibe at the time. I felt bamboozled to dance all the time, besides this me and my friends thought we also had imaginative, expressive and reflective stories to tell that were not being told at the time.

There was a healthy audience, which understood, related and was very enthusiastic towards our brand of Hip-Hop, which was in isiZulu and about our own local stories.



**UIA 2014 Durban:** Patron - Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu

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Peter Du Trevou (Administrator) | Secretariat: Tel: +27 31 940 4125 | [www.uia2014durban.org](http://www.uia2014durban.org)

Sonically it has taken a while to get to the point where I am now, with what I create and what influences my musical journey and life has. I have showcased my work around the country and the world, in search of my OTHERWHERE.

Thanks you for reading my story!

Siyabonga,

MANELIS

(Want to keep track of my journey or leave me a note?  
Drop me an email on: [manelis@isupportdoyou.com](mailto:manelis@isupportdoyou.com))



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