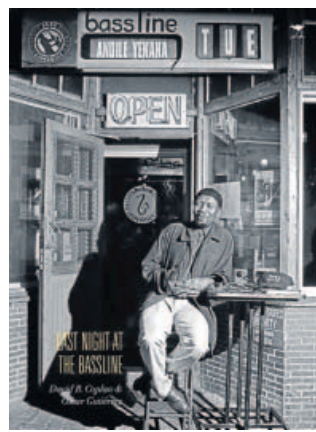


**BOOK REVIEW**



**GOLDEN AGE:** David Coplan and Óscar Gutiérrez take a look at the burgeoning 1990s Melville jazz scene in 'Last Night at the Bassline', above, and Frank and Nana Coyote, right, launch their new album 'Frankly Speaking' at Bassline Jazz Club  
Picture: MBUZENI ZULU



**WORD IS OUT**



**WELL VERSED:** Poet Lara Kirsten will be at McGregor's poetry weekend

**Poetry can make poverty pay**

IT'S time to dust off that knack for rhythm and meter and take those moments of poetic inspiration seriously. In the lead-up to the annual Poetry in McGregor weekend next month, entries have opened for its parallel poetry competition.

The search is on for work by unpublished poets, reflecting the theme of "poetry against poverty".

The winner of the adult open category bags R5 000.

In the school category, for pupils in grades 7 to 12, a new iPad awaits the winner.

The line-up for the August 25 to 27 poetry weekend includes Koos Kombuis, Ashley Dowds, Hugh Hodge, John Maytham, Lungiswa Nyatyowa, Lerato Sibanda, Philip de Vos, Diana Ferrus, Lara Kirsten and Wendy Woodward.

E-mail your entries — in English or Afrikaans — to [mcpoets@gmail.com](mailto:mcpoets@gmail.com) before August 10. See [www.poetryinmcgregor.co.za](http://www.poetryinmcgregor.co.za).



**ODE:** Kela Griot is in the line-up for Poetry in McGregor

# Coming in on the beat

Tribute takes us back to heady 1990s Melville, writes **Tymon Smith**

BY THE time I first entered the smoke-filled hole-in-the-wall on Seventh Avenue that was the Bassline, it was half-way through its tenure as the home of Johannesburg's bohemian intelligentsia and jazz aficionados.

That mix of exiles, writers, musicians and music lovers, many of whom had started having heated conversations about the future of the country back in the 1990s on the streets of Yeoville, had now migrated to the once sleepy, predominantly Afrikaans suburb of Melville, where the conversations continued and the music and the booze flowed under the darting eyes of gregarious Bassline owner Brad Holmes.

For those who walked through its doors it's hard to forget just how unique and influential a space it was in the early days of democratic South Africa.

Started by Krugersdorp-born Holmes, a waiter returned from years lived overseas in an effort to avoid military conscription, the Bassline during its 10-year tenancy

in Melville became a multiracial, liberated space for South Africans from all walks to get to know one another and the music it celebrated as the infectious, ever-surprising soundtrack to the heady days of the Mandela era.

Anthropologist, writer, musician and Bassline regular David Coplan has written a thoroughly engaging account of how Holmes, the times and the place came together to create a space that quickly stamped its mark on Johannesburg, the country and eventually the jazz world at large for the brief decade that many felt would never end.

It's a description of a time, place and people who we'd all still rather be

Here, brought to life by Coplan and the photographs of Melville stalwart and music photographer extraordinaire Óscar Gutiérrez, the spirits of too-soon-gone legends like Moses Molelekwa, Sipho Gumede, Allen Kwela, Gito Balo, Bheki Mseleku, Dorothy Rathebe and others are resurrected for a brief moment that reminds us of their enormous contributions to the shape of jazz currently and South African music in general.

This is thanks in no small part to their appearances on the crowded stage of the converted shop squeezed between Second and Third avenues on the Melville strip.

Although Coplan, as with all true jazz heads, can't resist occasional digressions into the technical aspects of some of his heroes, there are enough amusing anecdotes of the eccentricities of the cast to maintain a balance which will keep non-jazz devotees turning the pages.

If you were there, it's a book

that's a bittersweet reminder of a recent past that already seems so long ago and full of inspiring characters who are sadly no longer with us.

If you weren't, it's a sometimes envy-inducing description of a time, place and people who we'd all still rather be.

It wasn't the first place to begin to bring South Africans together, and it was not the only one of its time and it won't be the last.

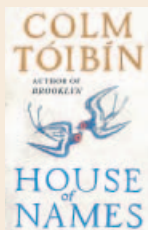
If there's any lesson to be learnt from the story of the Bassline, it's that in difficult times South Africans have an enormous capacity to figure things out together over a few glasses of whisky to the accompaniment of good music — that's a skill worth preserving, come what may, for to quote the club's slogan, "in music we trust", even when we can't trust much else.

● *Last Night at the Bassline* by David B Coplan and Óscar Gutiérrez is published by Jacana. R280

**SHORT TAKES**

## Ghosts, Greek tragedy and nasty Nazi rockets

**HOUSE OF NAMES** — Colm Tóibín  
There are elements of Greek tragedy (inter-generational strife, fraught mothers and sons, even a Mediterranean setting) in Tóibín's earlier novels. Here he fuses those experiments and takes us decisively to ancient Greece to retell *The Oresteia*: Clytemnestra's murder of Agamemnon and her murder in turn by their son Orestes.



It's a masterpiece. Available from *Exclusive Books* in hardback for R332, published by Penguin Books

**MOONGLOW** — Michael Chabon  
*Moonglow* is presented as the deathbed memories of Chabon's grandfather, an American-Jewish rocket scientist who never forgave Wernher von Braun his Nazi past. An author's note warns us that "liberties have been taken", but I think we'd have guessed — this is quite a tale.



The material would be sombre if the telling weren't so exuberant, the narrative threads so rich. Available from *Exclusive Books* in paperback for R499, published by Newbury House Publishers

**LINCOLN IN THE BARDO** — George Saunders  
From his short stories, we might have expected Saunders's long-awaited first novel to be some sprawling vision of a future US. In fact, it's a historical novel — albeit

one like no other. It revolves around the ghost of Abraham Lincoln's son Willie, who died aged 11, and his neighbours in the graveyard. It's an admirable feat of style — there's no single narrator, just gobbets of text by different speakers. Available from *Exclusive Books* in paperback for R338, published by Bloomsbury — © *The Daily Telegraph*



**BOOK BITES**

£162 000 — the expected price for three lots of correspondence between Jane Austen and her favourite niece, Anna Lefroy, which go on auction at Sotheby's in London next week. The correspondence includes a letter in which Austen enjoys herself by parodying the melodramatic style of popular women's fiction of the day.



**Maurice Sendak** — the popular children's author of 'Where the Wild Things Are' died five years ago but an unpublished manuscript found deep in his papers is set for publication next year. Titled 'Presto and Zesto in Limboland', the book tells a story based on the relationship between Sendak and his long-time contributor Arthur Yoricks.

**The Book Lounge** — where Chwayita Ngam-lana will launch her book 'If I Stay Right Here' this evening at 6pm, in conversation with SAFM's Shado Twala. — *Tymon Smith*