

Press Release

Tony Cedras and Maciek Schejbal – *River Conversations*

None of us get to choose where we are born. We arrive in this existence, naked and vulnerable, surrounded by our family, and ensconced in the music and culture, the sights, sounds and smells, (and the politics) of wherever we are born. These forces leave their mark on our true selves, even before we are aware of their influence. As vibrant and beautiful as some of them are, there are also forces at play in life that are difficult and challenging. We often have to struggle to be the person we desire to be, sometimes having to go against the grains of nationalism, ethnicity, and class to find our place in this world. In fact, many of us, despite our love of home and what we know, end up having to leave our home and become citizens of the world in order to find our balance. For Tony and Maciek this is certainly true. Both of these musicians left their respective homelands of South Africa and Poland for a larger global existence, crossing not just borders but cultures in their quest for richer lives as artists. They have absorbed new sights and sounds, collaborated with musicians from around the world and infused these influences into their music.

For seekers like Tony and Maciek it was an inevitable path. As I listen to their interplay and spirit in this music, I can't help but feel that I am a fly on the wall of some pub in the middle of anywhere or nowhere, seeing the reunion of two old friends lost in a conversation that has waited a long time to happen. It has the essence of both home and the long dusty road, which despite its treacherous and difficult footing has led us to this place. It is filled with happiness, camaraderie and joyous sounds that, wherever we are from, we can feel, understand, and enjoy. That is the magic that is music!

-Sean Conly, 2020

Tony Cedras

Born in Elsie's River, Cape Town, South Africa, Tony Cedras is a highly respected, sought after multi-instrumentalist and vocalist who is equally at home on accordion, harmonium, keyboard, trumpet and guitar. He has toured and recorded throughout the world as a longstanding member of Paul Simon's band as well as with Hugh Masekela, Miriam Makeba, Joan Baez, Harry Belafonte, Ziggy Marley, Henry Threadgill, Milton Nascimento, Ladysmith Black Mambazo, and Cassandra Wilson, among others.

Early in his career, Cedras became a key session player in the Cape Town jazz circuit, working with artists such as Jonathan Butler, tenor saxophonist Winston Mankunku, altoist Robbie Jansen, flautist/guitarist Russel Herman, and bassist Basil Moses. The Estudio project, together with Robbie Jansen and others was acknowledged as a highlight of this period.

In the early 80s Cedras relocated to Gaborone, Botswana, a home-away-from-home for many exiles. There he met Jonas Gwangwa, the musical director of the Amanda Ensemble of the ANC and travelled the world as an anti-apartheid cultural ambassador for "Nelson Mandela's People". In 1985 he moved to London where he made contact with other ex-pat South Africans and formed the group Kitone, recording two albums and touring the UK to great acclaim.

In 1986 he returned to South Africa and again worked with the exile artists community. While touring in Zimbabwe, Cedras was contacted at the suggestion of Hugh Masekela, with a request to join the Graceland Tour Band with whom he toured from 1987 - 1992 and remained a member of Paul Simon's band through 2013. During this period Tony relocated to New York City and recorded his debut solo album, *Vision Over People* in 1994

In 2013 Tony moved back to Cape Town where he intensified his support for the preservation and recognition of the Aboriginal Khoisan peoples of Southern Africa, and to raise awareness of their heritage and culture. Tony highlights his admiration and respect for his ancestral soil and heritage in his latest album *Love Letters to Cape Town*.

Maciek Schejbal

Maciek Schejbal grew up in Krakow, Poland where he earned a Masters Degree in classical percussion from the Academy of Music. He honed his craft on what was to become his life-long passion, the drum set, in the jazz, pop, fusion and avant-garde scenes of Krakow. He had the great fortune to share the stage with legends of Polish song, Ewa Demarczyk and Marek Grechuta, from whom he learned the art of performance. He has shared these skills in music schools wherever he has called home.

After the period of Poland's martial law, Maciek traveled to England with the Krakow Radio Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Krzysztof Penderecki. Following the performance, Maciek defected to London. After several months he moved to South Africa where he spent a decade developing his wide-ranging musical interests.

He performed with the Johannesburg and Cape Town symphony orchestras, jazz and African music artists including Winston Mankunku, Robbie Jansen, Basil 'Mannenbergh' Coetzee, The Genuines, and theater and dance groups. He taught drums at many centers around the country, including Mega Music in Johannesburg, 1820 Foundation in Grahamstown, Cape Town's Musical Action for People's Progress, The Jazz Workshop and the University of Cape Town.

Schejbal's involvement with the progressive theater circles of the Market Theater in Johannesburg allowed him to compose and perform his own music for several theater productions, which received both popular and critical acclaim. He wrote and work-shopped music for Barney Simon's *Flight*, and Gary Gordon's *Anatomical Journey of a Settler Man*, among other productions. Collaboration with actor Andrew Buckland brought *No Easy Walk*, an award-winning mime and music piece and *Thing?*, a play for three actors and three musicians.

Since his arrival in New York in 1993 Maciek has worked mostly with African performers, including a nearly 15-year collaboration with Cameroonian singer Kaïssa. He produced her first album, *Looking There*, and directed her various ensembles in venues across the globe. Maciek released his own album *Afro-Polka* in 2018 featuring leading jazz and World music artists. Recent collaborations include works with multidisciplinary artist Bahar Behbahani.

Maciek has been a faculty member of the Drummers Collective music school in Manhattan since 1998, teaching drums and music production.

Conversations - The River Flows

On a fated Cape Town night in 1992, after his performance with Paul Simon, Tony took Michael Brecker to hear the great tenor sax player Winston Mankunku. Maciek was on the gig and it was the beginning of a friendship and collaboration that has endured for three decades.

Several months later, now both residents of New York City, their friendship grew and musical paths intersected while performing with South Africans Morris Goldberg, Bakhiti Kumalo and Jimmy Mngwandi, as well as Cameroonian singer Kaïssa, percussionists Cyro Baptista and Café, bassist Leo Traversa, saxophonist Aaron Heick and many others. They performed numerous times as a duet, mostly in the famous Brooklyn restaurant Madiba.

River Conversations is a dialogue between two men who share a musical and cultural curiosity and bring a wealth of knowledge and virtuosity to this project. As young men in exile from their countries they also share an understanding of what it is like to take a principled stand and to miss family and home. They bring this deep connection, and passion for music and life to this exquisite exchange.

River Conversations was recorded in Maciek's river-view studio in Yonkers, New York.