

## The culture capital of South Africa is a hotbed of vibrant youth culture that sleeps with its dancing shoes on. Siki Geya reports

**J**ohannesburg, or Jozi, is a city that never sleeps. Its cosmopolitan lifestyle has led to it being dubbed the 'New York' of Africa and, without doubt, the title is befitting. *Egoli*, as the locals call it, is the 'City of Gold' where all Africans come chasing their dreams.

The city is a conglomerate of cultures. A walk downtown is a musical feast as an assortment of African languages attack your ears. Minibus taxis blaring music, car guards whistling to drivers, the madness of road rage, silence is rare. If you want the ultimate Jozi experience, head to Soweto or downtown where music and arts have been part of the city's regeneration. Some years ago, Jo'burg was one of the most dangerous cities in the world, but, despite the killing of Lucky Dube, it's much improved. You should still avoid being alone at night and, if you can, visit with a local friend.

Some of South Africa's music greats were born in this city. Music legends like Hugh Masekela, 'Mama Africa' Miriam Makeba (who now has a street named after her) and Dorothy Masuka cut their musical teeth in the dancehalls of Sophiatown. After performing all over the world, they have returned to the city to finally put their mics down. The legacy of their music has seeped into the younger generation – a culture made up of young, arty people ready to take over the musical world.

For them the sounds of the city are different. African hip-hop artists like Zulu Boy, Hip Hop Pantsula and Tuks Senganga have replaced the old jazz legends. These new South African music revolutionaries use African

languages to sell their music. Thandiswa Mazwai, Simphiwe Dana and Siphokazi are the daughters of Africa following in Mama Makeba's footsteps with startling voices.

For the city's young people, music is a reaffirmation of Africanism. Through the lyrics and the sounds, mixed with Western beats, the message is clear, "I am proudly South African and I am free."



The impressive Jo'burg skyline – South Africa's financial capital

### FESTIVALS

Spring is when the city awakens from its winter hibernation. From the end of August through to March, spring and summer madness envelopes the city.

#### The Joy of Jazz

This event draws jazz legends from all over Africa to entertain crowds with the best jazz sounds. This sell-out festival is a treat for African jazz lovers and takes place every year in August. [www.joyofjazz.co.za](http://www.joyofjazz.co.za)

#### Oppikoppi

This is one of the country's biggest festivals, held annually every August. Young and old from all over South Africa head to the bushveld for a weekend of alternative music in the Fountains valley. This is a haven for rock fans where South African bands display their skills while the crowd lies in the sun or find shade under the trees. For the ultimate outdoor camping experience, with a touch of music, Oppikoppi is definitely for you. [www.oppikoppi.co.za](http://www.oppikoppi.co.za)

#### Arts Alive

This is a month-long celebration of Jo'burg's artscape which takes place in September and October. The festival brings many great musos to town. This year's line-up featured Cuba's Omar Sosa, *kora* playing genius Mory Kanté, Malian guitarist Vieux Farka Touré, and Brazilian, Hermeto Pascoal alongside South African musicians such as singer Vusi Mahlasela. On top of all the music, there are also films, visual arts, poetry, theatre and dance. [www.artsalive.co.za](http://www.artsalive.co.za)

### VENUES

Newtown is to the new generation what Sophiatown was to older musicians. It's a small suburb – the cultural hub of Jozi – where young people go to feed their musical hunger. The Newtown circle is a collection of African restaurants and clubs where you're greeted by the sound of drums.

**Horror Café** is the dancehall melting pot and Newtown's biggest draw card. It's also a sacred home to the city's reggae lovers. Buffalo soldiers and dreadlocked rastas welcome you into their fascinating world of green, red, yellow and black. Every Thursday, the club bursts into life as youth from all over the city sway to the amazing beats of African reggae masters. **15 Becker Street, +27 (0)11 838 6735**

Newtown is also famous for its poetry culture. You can listen to different African languages in a way that transcends time, as young people meet to compete and compare their vocal prowess.

**Sophiatown Bar Lounge** is a chic restaurant that commemorates the old South African blues era. Named after the famous 1960s suburb, this 'hideout' is the best place to go to relive the old Sophiatown experience. Struggle music and famous 80s South African music blasts from the speakers. The wall art relives the embarrassment of apartheid laws, the demolition of district six, and the refuge black South Africans took in their music. It also serves good South African cuisine. **1 Central Place, +27 (0)11 836 5999**

**Kippies** in Newtown is the home to live

jazz. African jazz gurus meet here every Thursday to Sunday. This is where artists like McCoy Mrubata, Steve Hostix Mabusela and others mastered their craft and a playground for jazz-lovers. **66 Carr Street, +27 (0)11 836 1805**

A few streets away is **Bassline**, a popular spot for the city's young generation with a statue of the late Brenda Fassie outside. Here they dance to the sounds of *kwaito*, house music and jazz. DJs take turns on the turntables, playing some of the best global house sounds – the current rave sound of Jo'burg. **10 Henry Nxumalo Street, Newtown Music Centre, +27 (0)11 838 9145/60, www.bassline.co.za**

**7th Avenue** in Melville has an array of restaurants and bars. It's the ambiance – more than the food – that makes this street a sure destination. The bars are famous for cocktail specials and killer shooters. There's a place catering for every musical taste, from house music, *kwaito* and South African rock, to contemporary music.

**Social Bar, Six On 7th & Stripes On 7** are the most



The award-winning group, Mafikizolo, performing at Newtown's Bassline

popular music spots.

Grab a cab from anywhere around the city and they'll drop you at 7th.

Many venues hold monthly parties which are very popular. These parties are music celebrations of the country's growing music industry where hundreds of people congregate at selected venues every month.

#### Edgars Music Series

Newtown comes alive on the first Friday of every month as Bassline hosts its monthly 'Music Series'. This is hosted by Edgars, a chain retail store and Channel O, an African music channel ([www.channelo.co.za](http://www.channelo.co.za)). The series showcases some of the country's best acts and for a taste of South African youth culture and its music scene, this is a sure winner.

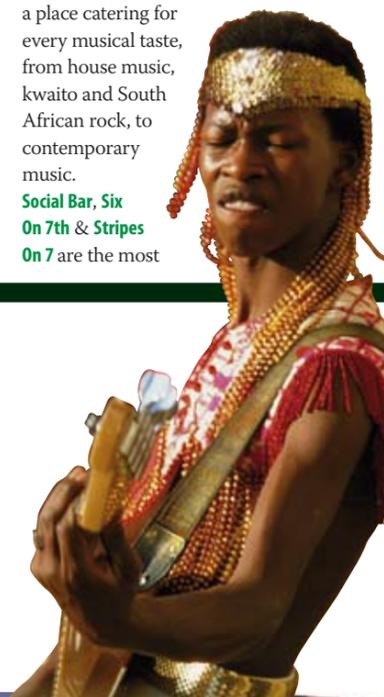
#### Yworld Sessions

These sessions, at various locations, are hosted by one of Jo'burg's leading youth radio stations Yfm. The last Thursday of every month is one big party. [www.yfm.co.za](http://www.yfm.co.za)

#### Soweto Festival

Every September the township transcends into a watercolour of activity for four days of music and arts. This event offers fashion shows, beauty pageants, *ikasi* life and all sorts of musical genres. Over 50,000 people visit the festival every year. [www.sowetofestival.co.za](http://www.sowetofestival.co.za)

Jo'burg is a buzz of musical activity all year round. But the best time to visit is between the beginning of September and April. Make sure to bring your best pair of dancing shoes.



Vusi Mahlasela playing at Arts Alive, which takes place in a tent erected on Mary Fitzgerald square, not a permanent venue



The township comes alive for the Soweto Festival

#### GOING TRAVELLING?

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