

TONY ALLEN & HUGH MASEKELA

names in African music. "I thought that sounds amazing, let's do something," Gold recalls. "But rather than plan it as a big thing, I thought we'd just get them together and see where it went." The opportunity arose the following year when Masekela was about to start a European tour. "We booked the studio for a weekend," Gold recalls. "They both said that's all they needed. We didn't have contracts and didn't know where it was going to go."

With none of the material pre-written, recording commenced with Allen playing the drums unaccompanied and Masekela studying the rhythmic pattern before blowing a melody. "I think if we'd planned it out and written stuff before we started it would have been boring," Allen says. "Every track was direct and spontaneous. It was just Hugh, the bass player from my band and me. Every time I changed my drum programme, that was the signal to start a new track."

"Hugh must have either been an instinctive genius or he was listening with an extraordinary intensity to what Tony was doing – or both, because there's an endless call and response in the tracks," Gold says. "It sounded like they were commenting on what each other was playing. We had a very relaxed two days but it was much more than just a blow."

By the end of the sessions, Masekela had given every tune a title and was also inspired to overdub some spontaneous vocals on three tracks, including 'Never (Lagos Never Gonna

be the Same)', a tribute to Fela Kuti sung in English and 'Jabulani (Rejoice, Here Comes Tony)', a tribute to Allen in Zulu. "You say it's a tribute to me," Allen says with a sly grin, "but I didn't know what he was singing. I never asked him. He could have been saying anything!"

With Allen's ambidextrous rhythms and Masekela's exquisite horn blowing and exhilarating vocal chants, the tracks embraced elements of Afrobeat and township jive, West African rhythm and improv jazz but blurred the lines between them to create a unique aesthetic space, which the drummer calls "a kind of South African-Nigerian swing-jazz stew."

"The feeling was really good," Allen says. "We were all thinking we were going to follow it up with overdubs of keyboards and so on. It was an exciting idea and we definitely intended to finish it – but for some reason it got abandoned." Over the next few years, the two men's paths crossed regularly at world music festivals. "Every time I saw him, Hugh would say 'Tony, what's happening with those recordings we did?' I told him I didn't know."

Eventually in 2017, Allen asked Gold if he could listen to the tapes again. Tragically, by then Masekela was seriously ill with cancer and, when he died in January 2018, Allen knew he had a duty to finish the album. "I said to Nick, 'Let's revive it as a tribute to Hugh.' He'd already done his job and his contribution was indelible. But it was up to us to finish the record."

Together Allen and Gold sketched out what more was needed. "The one instruction Hugh gave was 'you and Tony do what you want to finish it,'" Gold says. "With that brief we wanted to keep it quite minimalist because that dialogue between the two of them was the centrepiece – all it required really was a bit of saxophone for nuance and to emphasise the melody, keyboard and vibes to give a bit of light and shade, while still leaving a lot of space for the drums."

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