COME BACK, AFRICA
CREW

Produced and Directed by ......................... Lionel Rogosin
Written by .................................................... Lionel Rogosin with Lewis Nkosi and William Modisane
Photographed by ......................................... Ernst Artaria and Emil Knebel
Sound .......................................................... Walter Wettler
Edited by ..................................................... Carl Lerner
Assistant Editor ............................................. Hugh H. Robertson
Music Editor ................................................ Lucy Brown
South African consultant ................................ Boris Sackville
Clapper loader/production/sets ....................... Morris Hugh
Production staff ............................................ Elinor Hart, Morris Hugh, George Malebye
Featuring the music of ................................. Chatur Lal

CAST

Featuring the People of Johannesburg, South Africa
Myrtle Berman
Zacharia Mgabi
Steven
Vinah Bendile
Rams
Arnold
Hazel Futa
Auntie (Martha – Shebeen queen)
Lewis Nkosi
Dube-Dube
Bloke Modisane
Eddy
Can Thamba
George Malebye
Piet Beyleveld
Marumu
Ian Hoogendyk
Miriam Makeba
Alexander Sackville
Morris Hugh
Sarah Sackville
Lulu Masilela (uncredited)

“This film was made secretly in order to portray the true conditions of life in South Africa today. There are no professional actors in this drama of the fate of a man and his country.

This is the story of Zachariah – one of the hundreds of thousands of Africans forced each year off the land by the regime and into the gold mines.” — From Come Back, Africa

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Premiered at the 1959 Venice Film Festival.
Milestone’s Theatrical Premiere: January 27, 2012 at NYC’s Film Forum to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the ANC and the 80th birthday of Miriam Makeba.


Restored by the Cineteca di Bologna and the laboratory L’Imagine Ritrovata with the collaboration of Rogosin Heritage and the Anthology Film Archives in 2005. Supported by Fondazione Officina Cinema Sud-Est with the contribution of Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio.
Synopsis

*Come Back, Africa* chronicles the life of Zachariah, a black South African living under the rule of the harsh apartheid government in 1959.

As a shrill alarm signals daybreak, crowds of African people rush hurriedly through the dusty streets of Johannesburg. Zachariah, a young South African man, comes to Johannesburg, having been forced out of his KwaZulu village in southeast South Africa by famine. He arrives at the mines in search of a job; here he enters the run-down living quarters and meets a few other workers. Zachariah explains that he has come to the mines by train in search of a job, and that he was sent by officers recruiting workers. The other workers, however, tell him that the city will not allow him to work unless he has a permit. While the other workers fetch their supervisor to see if he can aid Zachariah in any way, Zachariah writes to his wife, Vinah, to send his greetings to his children and to his sister, as well as to ask her to send any money she can spare. When the supervisor arrives, he tells Zachariah that there is not much that he can do to help him; there are many different permits that blacks in South Africa need to obtain to be able to live and work in Johannesburg and these permits are not easy to come by. He cannot find work without a pass and he cannot get a pass without work.

Zachariah then gets a job as a “house boy” for a fairly well off white couple. The wife of the household treats Zachariah poorly; she scolds him for misdoing tasks that he does not completely understand (he accidentally discards her mushroom soup after being told to clean up the kitchen) and even rechristens him “Jack” when she does not like his name. Her husband is rather indifferent to Zachariah’s presence in the house and tells her that she needs to be more patient with him as he is only a native and is not as educated as they are. But she fires Zachariah on the spot when she finds him with whiskey on his breath wearing her scarf and dancing to the music on the radio in her bedroom.

Before Zachariah is fired from the household, he meets a few other black workers from the area and he talks to them about quitting his job as a result of his poor treatment. Here he meets Moloi, another worker who offers him help finding a job if he ever needs it.
After being fired, Zachariah is welcomed into a shebeen—a meeting place for social drinking—where a friendly group of black South Africans discuss options for Zachariah’s employment. They sing and drink together in a cramped, smoke-filled room and Zachariah meets Hazel, who flirts with him seductively until he pushes her away.

Zachariah is offered a job working at a mechanic shop with one of his friends, but he is quickly fired from that job as well after his boss finds that he and his friend are speaking poorly about him behind his back. Shortly after that, Zachariah’s wife, Vinah, who had traveled to join her husband in Sophiatown, discusses renting a room with Zachariah. Unable to legally rent a place to live with his wife and children, the shebeen owner, Auntie, helps them find a bleak room in a crumbling cottage.

As his search for a job continues, Zachariah and his friend from the mechanic shop inquire in a local upscale hotel about being hired as waiters after seeing a “help wanted” advertisement in the newspaper. Although Zachariah has no previous experience, he and his friend are hired, and the job seems to be going well. But as Zachariah delivers a tray of food to one of the rooms, a white woman sees him and screams that he is raping her. The hotel owner believes that Zachariah is innocent, but feels that it would be best if he did not come back.

When Vinah learns that Zachariah has been fired again, she offers to get a job to support the family. But Zachariah will not allow her to do so because he wants her to stay in the house to raise the children. This creates some tension between the couple—Vinah argues that Zachariah always refuses all of her efforts to help out the family.

Zachariah then has a harsh run-in with a man he sees at the general store. After waiting in line, Zachariah is pushed away brusquely from the counter by a rough-looking man named Marumu, who happens to be the leader of a gang of “tsotsis” (young black hoodlums) that is terrorizing the streets of Sophiatown. Zachariah is very upset by this, and when he sees Marumu later, the two come to blows.

Zachariah meets up in another smoky shebeen with several black South Africans who discuss the rights of blacks under apartheid. Can Themba argues that racism occurs because it is so easy to separate people by color, and they discuss Marumu’s use of force against Zachariah. Themba theorizes that using force is the only way Marumu has ever obtained what he wants. Themba, Lewis Nkosi, and Morris Hugh further discuss the position of liberals in their society—Lewis argues that the liberal does not want a real-life African as much as someone to “pat on the head.” Miriam Makeba then joins the group. When the others beg her, Makeba sings two songs, and the whole shebeen joins in.

Still unemployed, Zachariah looks to find yet another job—this time, a physically laborious job under the supervision of an engineer. The supervisor at this job agrees to consider hiring him if he can get his pass renewed.

Nighttime has fallen and Vinah and Zachariah are sharing a bed in their room, which—although they are married—is prohibited by law. The police arrest Zachariah. One officer stays behind, evidently in an attempt to take advantage of Vinah, who is able to pull away from his grasp when his superior re-enters the room.

Vinah worries about Zachariah, who is being held by the police, but her friends assure her that everything will be resolved. Later that night, Marumu, who had earlier fought with Zachariah, comes to their house and harasses Vinah. She struggles to free herself but he is more forceful and covers her mouth with his hands as she screams. He strangles her, and Vinah dies on her bed.

As the newly freed Zachariah walks toward his house, he hears the terrorized screams of his mute sister, Josephine. Anxiously, he runs into the house, where he finds Vinah’s body on the bed and Josephine cowering against the wall. He urges Josephine to get out of the house and when she leaves, he breaks down, throwing anything within his reach at the wall and banging his fists in rage and anguish on the table.

Statement from director Charles Burnett

I was deeply moved by this film. Come Back, Africa is a drama about black migrant workers negotiating the difficulties working in apartheid in South Africa, namely Johannesburg. Lionel Rogosin, the director, told a story in a way that gave you the illusion of watching reality unfold. Rogosin focus was on a world that dramatized the psychological and destructive effects that apartheid had on both black and white. The central characters continue to resonate. The beautiful black and white photography shares a lot with the great neo realist films. There are moments of poetry when the camera pans across a township. You see life. You see people trapped in time carrying on life. Even the inequality can’t deny children at play.
One of the special moments in the film is a scene in which Miriam Makeba sings two beautiful songs; they are so natural in the scene. I think that is what makes the film so wonderful. Things are not forced. Things happen like in life. Everything rings true. The end of the film lives with you.

_Come Back, Africa_ is on my best list.

**Lewis Nkosi on Come Back, Africa**

*(introducing the film in Bologna, Italy in 2005)*

“In South Africa when this film was made, you could not be buried in a cemetery unless you had the right papers. You could not live in a certain part of the city unless you had the right color. And you could not sleep with another person unless you were the same color. And it is that particular history that Lionel captured and it is a monument. Some monuments, like in your beautiful city, are carved in stone. And what you are proudly celebrating tonight is the fact that Lionel Rogosin was able to leave a monument in images of our history. Then, we were able to show the world what South Africa really was like.”

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_The Making of COME BACK, AFRICA_

_On the Bowery_, hailed by critics as an honest, objective glimpse into the lives of the men on New York’s skid row, succeeded in establishing Lionel Rogosin as a filmmaker dedicated to documenting, as clearly and truthfully as possible, the injustices and social ills suffered in various societies. Rogosin’s shots of dingy New York streets and their inhabitants, cast in shadow by the elevated subway tracks towering above, allowed him to gain experience in filming a society from the inside. _Come Back, Africa_ would do this in a far riskier setting — South Africa under harsh rule of an apartheid government.

After resigning from his family-owned business at age 30, Rogosin had dreamed of making films that would expose “what people try to avoid seeing.” *(Horizon Magazine, March 1961)* During the production of _On the Bowery_, Rogosin imagined making a trilogy of films based on racism in three different parts of the world—the United States, South Africa, and Asia. _Come Back, Africa_ was to be the first film in the series.
According to Rogosin in his memoirs:

“Anything remotely resembling fascism had to be fought with all the energy that one could possibly muster. It seems remarkable how unfashionable this attitude appears today. Particularly remarkable considering that it was less than two decades ago that the Nazi barbarians nearly crushed civilization and made the world a nightmare to live in... I felt some desperate need to communicate to people everywhere the disastrous effects of such unchecked primitive behavior.”

Apartheid rule, a legal system of separation according to race, began in South Africa in 1948. This system forced black South Africans — who composed a majority of the population — into crowded slums where they received poorer public services than those provided to the white minority. Lewis Nkosi, who helped to write the script, wrote in his book *Home and Exile* that

“For a black man to live in South Africa in the second half of the twentieth century and at the same time preserve his sanity, he requires an enormous sense of humor and a surrealistic kind of brutal wit...these qualities seem to provide the only means of defense against a spiritual chaos and confusion which would rob any man of his mental health.”

Rogosin and his wife Elinor arrived in Cape Town, South Africa on May 29, 1957. At this time, 156 leaders of the African National Congress and its allies (including Nelson Mandela) were on trial for high treason. The trial would last the entire time they were there. It should be noted at that time in the United States, these equal rights protestors were considered to be communist agitators and that South Africa was an ally in the Cold War.

The Rogosins spent nine months preparing and getting to know the people and country. Rogosin trod carefully to prepare his film knowing that any mistakes and contacts with the anti-apartheid community would put his project at risk. Early on, he secretly met Myrtle and Marty Berman who were organizers in the anti-apartheid movement. It was an important connection as they began to introduce him to the groups fighting against apartheid.

During this time, Lionel and Elinor toured the country, becoming accustomed to the way of life in South Africa. Through months of trying to gain the proper visas and tourist permits, Rogosin acquired a sense of the apartheid government’s sensitivity to anti-government “conspiracies.” They were restricting anything, like the film he wished to create, that questioned their morality. Rogosin learned to combat suspicion if aroused. “The regime is far less aware of whom the agent is than the agent is aware of the regime,” he professed.

At the same time, visits around the country were at times perilous, especially with a young, pregnant wife (with Michael, the first of three boys), treacherous roads and faulty cars. Traveling on Good Friday evening on the Johannesburg-Durban road, they suddenly saw a car from the opposite lane try to pass and come right at them. The crash was significant and they were badly bruised with some bleeding. It was many tense hours to get back to Johannesburg before they were able to get Elinor to a doctor the next day, tend to their wounds and make sure she had not suffered a miscarriage. Elinor continued to work on the film, most importantly as script girl (the person in charge of continuity jotting down the details of clothing, props, action and anything else that would help match connecting scenes shot sometimes days apart), and taking stills, as well as preparing the breakfasts and lunches for the cast and crew and then helping to watch the rushes at night. As she put it, “I was pregnant during most of the filming, and other than the odd contrast of my natural birth, breathing classes and the daily duties as a script girl on a subversive film, there were no problems.” (She also wrote that it was Ernst Artaria cooking a farewell pasta dinner and splattering the walls with sauce that sent her into labor. Michael Rogosin was born September 17, 1958 at the Florence Nightingale Hospital in South Africa.)

Finding likeminded coworkers within South Africa proved to be a challenge because of the risks it involved in attracting attention to the project. So Rogosin turned to Europe, where he found Fred (Walter) Wettler and Ernst Artaria. After watching several documentaries in an effort to find a photographer whose style would match the attitude and content of the film, Rogosin decided to fly to Israel to meet Emil (Milek) Knebel. Rogosin found a perfect match in Knebel, who was enthusiastic about the project and sympathetic to the cause. It proved, however, extremely difficult to get working visas for his crew. There were months of maddening bureaucratic red tape created in large part, to discourage his work, including a dangerous meeting with the South Africa Criminal Investigation Department’s infamous Colonel Spengler.

His search to find South Africans to play roles (which had yet to be written) would be the next step in the pre-production stage. First, Rogosin made connections with people who would help him write a script and find an appropriate cast. He had already become friends with Mary Benson after meeting her in Europe. Her connection to
the Africa Bureau made her a valuable and enthusiastic liaison to anti-Apartheid whites in South Africa. Through Rogosin’s acquaintance with Benson, he met a pro-African couple called the Levsons, who introduced him to Bloke Modisane. Modisane would play a tremendous role in writing the film, finding actors for the parts, and even acted in the film himself. Most of all, he led Rogosin into the ways of South African culture and politics. In his book, Blame Me on History, Modisane writes:

“Lionel became an exhaustive enquirer, penetrating into the squalor of the locations to feel the heart-beat of the Africans; I took him into the shebeens which were reeking with sweat and the smell of stale beer to listen to the people talking, sometimes with bitterness but always with humor, about the injustice, the misery, the poverty which was a part of their lives…By the time he was ready to start filming we had accepted him as an African, conditioned him to see black, to feel black and to react black…”

Modisane’s friend, Drum journalist Lewis Nkosi, would play a similar role. Rogosin had met Nkosi earlier at the newspaper Golden City Post’s offices, but they did not impress each other. However, when the United States Information Services screened Rogosin’s film Out in Johannesburg, Nkosi attended and was very impressed by the film. They quickly became friends.

“Lewis was an excellent reporter who had a lot of courage. Not only was that necessary for his job, but he showed it against every form of racism that he encountered…Sometimes one felt the courage was a bit reckless, and yet one couldn’t help admiring his fight against injustice.” — A Man Possessed, Lionel Rogosin.

Nkosi and Modisane co-wrote the film and acted as a friend to Rogosin throughout the production stages.

“I told Bloke and Lewis that I wanted them to help me write the script and I wanted them to give me the story. And so the three of us sat down on a Saturday afternoon and I made notes. It took about six hours, and that was it. That was our story.” — A Man Possessed

After the story was outlined, it took ten more days to write the script. The original title of the film was Anno Domini 1957. As he became closer to Modisane and Nkosi, Rogosin spent an increasing amount of time in Sophiatown, along with Morris Hugh—another actor in the film who helped introduce the filmmaker to South African black life.

At another of the shebeens, Rogosin met Can Themba, the associate editor of Drum magazine, who he described as already a legend. “There was something in Can’s manner of speaking that was almost poetic. I was extremely impressed by this man, and moved by him emotionally… I decided to use him for my discussion in the shebeen scene, and it turned out to be the right choice.” — from A Man Possessed.

The restrictions on black South Africans at the time of the film’s production proved to be quite restrictive in all phases. Blacks were forced to carry a pass with them at all times, which restricted them to farm or mine jobs because of the difficulty of obtaining the proper passes to work in the cities. This led to the separation of families—the Group Areas Act forbade husbands and wives of domestic servants to live together on their employers’ premises. As Africans were prevented from enjoying such basic human rights, the rates of crime, prostitution, and illegitimate births steadily rose. The damage caused by the usurpation of basic rights was worsened by insulting and belittling laws—like those that forbade whites from serving alcoholic beverages to blacks and, of course, the restrictive “black only” or “white only” areas. In addition, the government began the enforcement of laws (such as the 1913 Land Act) that served “to drive the native peasant off the land… the only refuge that the native had was the town.” (Sir William Berry cited in Litheko Modisane’s Come Back, Africa (1959): From Africa to America, and Back Again)

Blacks who had been separated into urban ghettos decades before were now considered a threat to the whites in South Africa, and so previously designated “black spots” were demolished and their residents transported to even worse areas. The result of this policy was the demolition of vibrant black towns such as Sophiatown, which was being gradually destroyed during the production of Rogosin’s film.

Of course, the oppressive South African government would not permit anyone to shoot the type of film that Rogosin aimed to produce. So Rogosin was forced to exercise great creativity and considerable cleverness in concocting cover stories and ad-lib explanations about his intentions in the country. One explanation was that he was in South Africa to film a travelogue for a tourism company. His friends, the Levsons, had introduced him to the head of Finches Travel Agency who agreed to have a film made. Therefore, he had an excuse to be filming in different areas of the country. Another explanation, which he told first to a member of a film society in South Africa, was that he was going to make a film based on the book Commando by Denyes Reitz, which was a detailed account of the author’s experience as a soldier in the Second Boer War in South Africa. This story got quite a bit of publicity and quickly morphed into a full-fledged rumor, involving actors and storylines that Rogosin never intended to
incorporate in the first place. The production team also spread the rumor that they were filming a musical, a theory that seemed partially substantiated by Rogosin’s footage and shots of street musicians in Sophiatown — some of which appeared in *Come Back, Africa*.

Finding the exact personalities necessary for the film was Rogosin’s next step in pre-production. He followed the unique route of casting actors and actresses for the film before writing parts for them—a decision largely influenced by his experience filming *On the Bowery*. Rogosin discovered that he only really started to understand the personalities of his actors at the end of the shooting, and he wanted to avoid a similar trial in making *Come Back, Africa*. He first attempted to find actors and actresses by placing an advertisement in the local newspaper. This led him to a casting session at the Union of South African Artists on Jeppe Street where he discovered all the leading black actresses in the film. Vinah Bendile was cast in the leading role, Hazel Futa as the shebeen girl (though Lionel states that he had met her earlier at Modisane’s shebeen), and a young singer Miriam Makeba, was chosen for her impressive vocal talents. The three were all from the Xhosas people who came from the southeast region of South Africa. At one point, Makeba was considered for the lead role, but Rogosin really wanted to feature her singing voice and her beautiful trained singing would not have been right for the wife of a poor Zulu tribesman.

Elinor, Bloke and Lewis agreed unanimously that Vinah Bendile would be the perfect choice as the wife. At that time, Bendile was also working as a domestic servant for a lower-middle-class family in Mayfair and her sister was able to replace her during the shooting of the film. Bendile continued her career as an actress after the film for Union Artists with the South African jazz opera *King Kong* (about a boxer who kills his sweetheart and dies in prison) and became well known as a model, singer and dancer. *King Kong* took her to London and she even appeared in a bit role on Broadway in 1964 in Alan Paton and Krishna Sha’s Union Artist play, *Sponono*.

However, the male actors who had responded to the newspaper advertisement did not fit Rogosin’s criteria for the lead roles. Instead, he and Modisane turned his attention instead to a real-life setting in which he could better observe faces and body types: a bus queue, where many South Africans were returning from their jobs. Modisane played an important part not only to translate the Zulu language, but also to reassure the potential actors that Rogosin wasn’t a government official. One day, when Modisane was unable to make it and he had Morris Hugh with him instead, Rogosin discovered two men who would be perfect. One man, Nathaniel, a dental technician, did not make it to the audition the next day. The other was Zacharia Mgabi, who Rogosin hired after he improvised a scene together with Bendile. Rogosin said later that “his face was just right, his personality identical to my conception in the script, and he was a natural actor.”

Once the proper visas were obtained, production could begin. Rogosin had hoped to start shooting by May 1, 1958 but because of all the delays in getting visas for his crew, they weren’t able to begin until July. By then, Makeba was leaving for a tour at the end of the week, so her shebeen scene had to be shot first. Since rooms in Sophiatown were very small and they had to also fit in two cameramen, a director and a soundman, it was necessary to use a set. Martha (also known as Auntie and the shebeen Queen in the film) suggested they use the Community of the Resurrection’s empty schoolrooms. The priests had closed it down with Father Huddleston’s refusal to comply with the Bantu Education Act. It was to be Rogosin’s first “set” and one of the very few in his career as he always preferred natural locations. The shooting of the shebeen got off to a rocky start when Rogosin found the participants a little flat in their conversation. Additionally, Makeba came in late and demanded more money (Rogosin complied). Fortunately, the next day went much better and Makeba did her scenes in one night’s time.

On the whole, the film was a very difficult shoot as they had to get up at 5:00 a.m. for some of the dawn scenes, 7:00 a.m. for the rehearsed scenes, and they rarely came home before 11:00 each evening. Sometimes shooting would last until 2:00 in the morning.

Shooting was tense because of the constant threat of being discovered or questioned by South African authorities—which occurred several times. Certain crew members were dropped out of suspicion of loyalty to the government and problems with some of the lead actors (their weak command of the English language, difficulty in ad-libbing, showing up late to work) led to exhaustion and frustration. Filming scenes of the penny-whistling children proved to be more difficult than Rogosin would have imagined because of the children’s behavior in front of the camera. Picking white actors for scenes such as the one shot in the house in which Zachariah worked would prove to be even more difficult. It was more dangerous than shooting the scenes with black actors because of issues with political security. Some of the white actors were friends of Rogosin and his crew. This included Myrtle Berman, who played the shrewish housewife. At first Rogosin hesitated to cast her for that role because she was such a “wonderful person” and so helpful to his cause. Other actors were discovered going door-to-door based on suggestions from...
sympathetic whites. The entire shooting process was made even more intensely exhausting by the looming deadline of three months when their visas would expire and production would have to end.

Early on, Rogosin was determined to ship out of the country all the raw footage rather than have it processed at Irene Laboratories in Johannesburg. Rogosin found the owner of the lab of questionable politics and was afraid they would discover the true nature of the film. So he made arrangements with Pan American Airways to ship out on the two flights they had each week to New York — on Tuesday and Saturday. Unfortunately, the missed the first shipping date because they couldn’t find anyone to properly pack the film. So in addition to their regular work, they took this duty on as well. By the end of that week they were already “fatigued.” By the fourth week and having had only one day off, Rogosin found he was “affected by a numbness” due to the constant fear of discovery, and the chaos of shooting ever since he fired his production manager who he deemed untrustworthy to keep their true script secret. (Morris Hugh became the de-factor production assistant.) But as he described himself during this time, he was a man possessed. He was tired and every step seemed like agony, but he was never, ever discouraged during the shooting. It was only later, when the film was completed and the distributors backed away from such a dangerous subject, that he found it disheartening.

After the first month of pushing hard to shoot the film – Rogosin finally insisted they take a weekend off. They went to Rustenburg in the nearby mountains. While visiting some caves, Artaria suddenly felt faint – he apparently had some claustrophobia. This would be a real problem for shooting in the mines and Rogosin was afraid that Knebel would be unable to handle those scenes by himself. At that time, the owners of the South African gold mines were still very secretive about their practices and weary of foreigners. They went to the mines of Marievale where the general manager and his staff allowed them to shoot the entrance, the training school, even down in the mines 6,000 feet below the surface. There were many difficulties with the general manager and Rogosin spent his few days working there in fear that they would check with the authorities about the shooting. (Rogosin had no permit to shoot in the mines.) Of course, the filmmakers were also novices and there were several cases where they were completely unnerved down in the mines when they had to be closed due to dangerous conditions.

There were two other problems that they were facing. One was that they couldn’t use a local facility to view their rushes coming back from New York. Luckily and by accident, Rogosin came across an old portable 35mm projector he could use in his flat. The other was more serious – they saved for the last the scenes involving white actors, especially posing as policeman. Shooting in Alexandra Township with them was a serious offence (no whites were allowed in the shantytown) and either they had to risk asking permission and being closed down or they had to avoid being seen by the police. It was Modisane’s advice to risk being caught and Rogosin was confident that he could talk his way out of any situation. The shooting did finish without discovery, but Rogosin noted that it was very nerve-wracking and caused a lot of tension for the crew. It was in Alexandra Township that they shot the penny-whistler scenes where they play games and fight in the streets.

When production was finished, Rogosin and Carl Lerner edited the film in New York City. It was a smooth process. Eduardo Mondlane, although originally from Mozambique, knew Zulu quite well and was able to translate parts of the film so that subtitles could be added. (A new translation was done by the Cineteca di Bologna when the film was restored as new theories on subtitling have evolved since 1960.) Mondlane later became the head of the Mozambican Liberation Front in an attempt to free his country from Portuguese rule. The film was presented at the 1959 Venice Film Festival, where it was a huge success — propelling it to further success in Paris and London. New York would prove more difficult, as there was a backlog of films waiting to be opened before. With the help of Lew Gittler, a publicity agent, Rogosin bought an old theater. The newly named Bleeker Street Cinema premiered Come Back, Africa on April 4, 1960. It was barely three weeks after the tragic Sharpville Massacre that had occurred in South Africa on March 21st.

Miriam Makeba was invited as a special guest to the Venice Film Festival. When she arrived, she found that she was already a sensation in the States. Rogosin had shown Come Back, Africa to Steve Allen and he immediately booked her for his hit national television show. Having never seen television, the meaning of this initially escaped her. (She appeared on November 1, 1959.) It was an astonishing time for Makeba as she experienced life outside of South Africa’s harsh restrictions and segregation. Her Afro hairstyle created a fashion trend. Rogosin became her agent and booked her around Europe and in New York at the legendary Village Vanguard. Harry Belafonte had seen the film in London and was taken by her talent. He met her at the club and immediately took charge of launching her career. This led to a disagreement that proved a ragged and sad end to Makeba and Rogosin’s friendship.

All in all, 120,000 feet of film was shot in South Africa and it was edited down to the A 8000-foot length on its release. The cost of the film was $70,000.
Comments on Come Back, Africa

“I can imagine no picture more relevant to the horrifying tragedy of South Africa than Lionel Rogosin’s *Come Back, Africa*. This film, because it is so compassionate as well as realistic, is a most moving presentation of the truth.” — Father Trevor Huddleston, 1960

“Who are the Afrikaners? They helped to make this smear film. In one scene constables in pure Afrikaans, without a trace of an English accent, make an immoral suggestion to a Native woman whose husband has been arrested for some mistake in his reference book. It is the most shocking scene in the film.” — Die Brandwag, an Afrikaaner magazine, 1959.

“Not long ago I saw a movie on African life which I hope will be widely shown in this country. It is a simple story of an African trying to escape famine in his village and to earn a little money for his family and perhaps be reunited with them in Johannesburg — if he can find work in that South African city. He never does succeed, but the story is developed with understanding and sympathy for the African facing the problems of this area at the present time. It is well worth seeing.” — Eleanor Roosevelt, May 12, 1959.

Sophiatown

Sophiatown, a ghetto reserved for blacks in Johannesburg (about four miles west of its center) was a vibrant center of music, art, literature and politics that has since become legendary. In February 1955, two thousand policemen, armed with handguns, rifles and clubs known as knobkerries, forcefully moved the black families of Sophiatown to Meadowlands in Soweto.

Residents included Desmond Tutu, Nelson Mandela, Father Trevor Huddleston, Hugh Masekela and three of the film’s main contributors – author/journalists Bloke Modisane and Can Themba and the already celebrated singer, Miriam Makeba. Makeba, later known world-wide as “Mamma Africa,” helped popularize “Meadowlands,” a song against the forced removals, and in 1959 recorded “Sophiatown is Gone.”

But even as they filmed, Sophiatown was already in the process of being demolished and its residents forcibly removed. Shortly after production ended, Sophiatown was emptied, razed and rebuilt as a whites only suburb called Triumf (in English, “Triumph”.

Awards and Recognition

- Italian Critics Award, Venice Film Festival, 1959
- Winner of the award for “the film showing the most significant advance in content means of expression and technique.”—the Canadian Federation of Film Societies, Vancouver Film Festival, 1959
- Selected by Time Magazine as one of the “Ten Best Pictures of 1960”
- Selected by Chevalier de la Barre, Paris, as “Most Worthy Picture of 1960”

First Screening of Come Back, Africa in South Africa

(from Ros Sarkin’s article in PIX3, 2001, p. 151, published by the British Film Institute)

By the early 1980s, P.W. Botha’s apartheid government was teetering between promised reforms in the country and increased security to “protect” against expected violence in protest of the changes. Thousands were being arrested for their political beliefs throughout the decade. Meanwhile, there were increased calls from within and outside the country to abolish the proposed reforms by simply abolishing apartheid. It was a very tense time of political upheaval and violence.

It was in this atmosphere that the banned *Come Back, Africa* finally premiered in South Africa at the 1982 Durban International Film Festival due to the courage of programmer Ros Sarkin. It was first screened in Umlazi at the only cinema in this poor township — the manager was a member of the ANC. They also screened the film on the University of Natal campus and a Durban cinema. It was a full house in Umlazi with many banned people (such as Professor Fatima Meer and Rolly Arenstein) in attendance. There were people in attendance specifically to usher
those people out quickly if “things got heavy.” At first, only the KwaZulu Police arrived to intimidate the audience. But later, the South African Police entered and pointed their guns at the audience. The festival staff called out to the audience to remain seated. The screening went on.

In Durban, the Security Branch police showed up and threatened to smash the projector if the screening continued. Sarkin suggested that if this happened, it would make front-page headlines. The police deliberated and left. *Come Back, Africa* remained officially banned in the country until 1988, near the end of apartheid. Even in the United States, much to Rogosin’s deep regret, American television refused to show the film as being too political.

**Lionel Rogosin**

**January 22, 1924 - December 8, 2000**

“Reality – Life is Film” (Lionel Rogosin in a 1955 note)

As an independent producer, director and distributor, Lionel Rogosin was one of the founders of the New American Cinema movement. This informal group of filmmakers, including Morris Engels and Sydney Meyers, sought to create a cinema free from the economic and structural shackles of Hollywood and to discard standard conventions of plot and structure. Inspired by Robert Flaherty (“Man of Aran” had a profound effect on me and was a powerful motivation to my making *On the Bowery* and *Come Back, Africa*) and the Italian neo-realists and equipped with lighter, more portable cameras, sound recorders and lighting setups, these directors shot on the city streets and focused on real life. One filmmaker who was strongly influenced by this movement was John Cassavetes, who said, in *The Film Director as Superstar* by Joseph Gelmis, “To tell the truth as you see it, incidentally, is not necessarily the truth. To tell the truth as someone else sees it is, to me, much more important and enlightening. Some documentaries are fantastic. Like Lionel Rogosin’s pictures, for instance; like *On The Bowery*. This is a guy who’s probably the greatest documentary filmmaker of all time, in my opinion.”

Rogosin experienced fascism firsthand as a soldier in World War II and vowed that he would continue to fight against it whenever and wherever he saw the threat of it reemerging. A *Newsweek* critic called Rogosin “a man of profound humanism.” Rogosin wrote of his anti-fascist views, “This was the conviction that caused my anguish and indignation about apartheid in South Africa and racism in the United States.” He decided to make films that expressed his political activism — he exposed oppression before it became fashionable and his subject matter was groundbreaking. His unique filmic approach brought him acclaim, but his empathy for the downtrodden, combined with a desire not to dramatize their plight, made it difficult to find financing for his film projects.

Born in New York, Lionel Rogosin (ro’ geh-sin) was the only child of Israel and Evelyn Vogedes Rogosin. His father, a poor Russian immigrant with little education, started a sweater factory in Brooklyn at age 18 and made his
first million dollars by the next year. Lionel grew up in the wealthy (and primarily non-Jewish) New York suburb of Port Washington, Long Island and was expected to join the family business. He went to Yale to study chemical engineering, but before graduating, he volunteered to serve in the Navy for two years during World War II.

Upon his return, he joined his father’s successful Beaunit Mills, by then the industry leader in producing rayon fabrics. During this time, Rogosin traveled to war-torn Eastern and Western Europe as well as Israel. Rogosin writes of his experiences during this time:

I decided to join Beaunit Mills Inc. my father’s corporation for several reasons, which originated on the bridge of my ship AMC 94(Auxiliary Mine Sweeper) during a hurricane in Charleston harbor in 1945. Standing there in the calm between storms I meditated about my existence and the state of the universe.

I knew that I would soon leave the Navy and I felt I needed to formulate a plan for my future life. WWII had left me shaken and disturbed. I was aware of the holocaust and the horror of nuclear weapons that had been dropped at Hiroshima and Nagasaki and I was not overjoyed by those events although we were told that nuclear weapons had ended the war with Japan. I was skeptical about that reasoning and after some examination I don’t believe it was necessary. My reasoning then was that after such disasters going back to a normal existence was absurd. If everyone did not dedicate his life to profound changes in society and the cause of peace at least I would do so.

I wasn’t sure how to proceed with this vision but I decided to be practical which meant to eventually join my father’s business in order to have a financial base from which to function.

Rogosin quickly became president of the textile division but was unsatisfied with the work. Influenced at an early age by the film All Quiet on the Western Front, as well as his experience in the war and later travels, he was convinced that he needed to take a more active role in society. “I got restless, so one day I wandered along the Bowery with a camera, and there you are… Of course, it wasn’t as simple as that.” He had seen the images of the Holocaust and had witnessed terrible racism in his own country, and after a brief stint as an assistant on a short film by Roger Tilton about square dancing, he decided to confront these ills with a camera.

In 1954 Rogosin resigned from Beaunit Mills and invested his own money — an estimated $30,000 — in the production of On The Bowery. Although it received the Grand Prize for documentary film at the Venice Film Festival and was nominated for an Academy Award, the film also had detractors. Many mainstream critics could not see past the film’s rejection of Hollywood production values and actors. They considered the storyline weak (it had no formal plot), the cinematography gritty (focused on scenes of real squalor and poverty) and the acting rough. Bosley Crowther of the New York Times described On the Bowery as “sordid and pitiful.” But others recognized The Little Fugitives and On the Bowery as signs of the emergence of a new cinematic art form. Interestingly enough, Rogosin claimed not to have seen an American film for many years prior to making On the Bowery. “I was isolated at that time… you have to understand that above all, I’ve been inspired, motivated by life and not by films.”

In 1956, Rogosin married Elinor Hart who, under her married name, became a well-known dance critic in the 1960s. With confidence based on the reception of On The Bowery, Rogosin decided to take a real chance. For several years he had considered making a film to protest apartheid. After meeting the secretary of the NAACP, Walter White, and South African writer Alan Paton (Cry, the Beloved Country), he decided this was something he had to do. In an incredibly courageous act of defiance, Rogosin entered South Africa on a tourist visa with his pregnant wife in tow (their eldest son Michael was born during the making of the film.)

The couple lived in the country for a year, making friends and important connections while observing the political system of oppression. Even though film equipment had become more lightweight and portable, it was still impossible to film without attracting the attention of the authorities. They applied for a permit to film, on different occasions presenting their project as a travelogue to promote South African tourism or a documentary celebrating the music of the country. Despite bureaucratic delays, hostility and the great danger of being discovered, authorization to film was granted, and Rogosin quickly gathered together a cast and crew. The plot for Come Back, Africa was written under the guidance of two young anti-apartheid Africans, Lewis Nkosi and William “Bloke” Modisane, who appear in the film. Also making an appearance is the very young, very beautiful singer, Miriam Makeba.

After making the film, Rogosin helped Makeba flee South Africa and supported her financially, promoting her career in Europe and the US. After a performance at the Village Vanguard in New York she met Harry Belafonte,
who convinced her to break her contract with Rogosin and come under his wing. Makeba later resented Lionel’s original involvement and his contribution to her success was unjustly forgotten.

As with On the Bowery, Rogosin’s aim was, “…to induce the actors to add their own experience, poetry and understanding to my bare outline, thus giving flesh and substance to the structure of my brief, intense period of observation of their lives and problems.” Shooting in secret in restricted areas, or in public under the police’s noses by posing as a travelogue director, Rogosin and his crew spent their entire time terrified of being discovered and facing the consequences. Fearful that the South African film labs would realize their true intentions, the filmmakers smuggled the raw footage out of the country and developed it in the U.S., where Carl Lerner edited the film. Rogosin finished shooting and returned to New York, leaving cinematographer Emil Knebel to shoot additional footage as needed. Just as Knebel was finishing up, the South African government heard stories of the film and asked him to leave the country.

Taking its title from Mayibuye I Afrika, an African National Congress slogan, Come Back, Africa premiered at the 1959 Venice Film Festival. It received the Critics Award and great acclaim, but still faced some of the same criticisms applied to On the Bowery.

Finding no attractive distribution deal for his film, Rogosin took a ten-year lease on the Renata Theater in New York and spent $40,000 to renovate and convert it into a film theater. The re-named Bleecker Street Cinema became the place to exhibit art and political films for the next twenty-five years. (Rogosin sold the theater in 1974 to Sid Geffen.) Come Back, Africa opened on April 4, 1960, less than a month after the infamous Sharpeville massacre. The film received some rave reviews and Time magazine chose it as one of the ten best films of the year. Despite critical success, the film failed to find an audience. “What I learned was that white people at the time really weren’t interested in what was going on down in South Africa.”

On September 28, 1960, Lionel Rogosin, Jonas Mekas and 21 other filmmakers became the founding members of the New American Cinema group. They created a manifesto emphasizing personal expression, rejection of censorship and the “abolition of the budget myth.” Their statement was simple: “The Official cinema of the world has run out of breath. It is morally corrupt, aesthetically obsolete, thematically superficial, and temperamentally boring.” Rather than a cohesive collective, the New American Cinema became a diffuse band of New-York based filmmakers, photographers, painters, dancers, actors and artists. They met frequently at the Bleecker Street Cinema in its early days, to discuss, as Jonas Mekas wrote, “dreams and problems of independently working filmmakers. Several small committees were created in order to explore the financing, promotion, and distribution of our films.”

At the time, he was busy preparing his next film — a protest against the horrors of war and a plea to promote peace. The film, three years in the making, became Good Times, Wonderful Times. Inspired by Joan Littlewood’s production of Oh What a Lovely War!, the film combined archival footage of 20th-century war, film of the nuclear devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and scenes from a trendy London cocktail party. The conversation from the party reflected the apathy and hedonism of most of the people at the time. At one point, a guest actually observes, “If one looks at the world, war is one way of keeping the population down.” Once again, critics regarded Rogosin’s film either as a masterpiece or overly difficult. But Good Times, Wonderful Times was a success on college campuses and the film was one of the first to oppose the Vietnam War and helped inspire the antiwar protest movement.

Once again finding it difficult to distribute a film that was before its time, Rogosin set up a distribution company. Originally called Rogosin Films, and later renamed Impact Films, the new company promoted itself as “an internationally acclaimed collection of controversial features and shorts.”

Devoting his energy to his distribution company and distracted by the collapse of his marriage to Hart (the couple had three sons), Rogosin did not complete another film until 1970. Rogosin initially considered Come Back, Africa as the first part of a trilogy that would include a parallel study of racism against African Americans, entitled Come Back, America, and a final section on a newly independent country, such as India. However, with his funds depleted, he instead produced a one-hour documentary, Black Roots, featuring five black activists. Their sometimes horrifying, sometimes humorous stories about growing up in white America were played against images of young blacks filmed on the streets of Harlem and music by John Coltrane, Ray Charles, Jimi Hendrix and James Brown. After receiving mixed reviews once again, Rogosin went on to film Black Fantasy, featuring one of the activists from the previous film, musician Jim Collier. Based on Collier’s stream-of-consciousness monologue, Rogosin strove to create something equivalent to James Joyce’s Ulysses. His next film, Woodcutters of the Deep South (1973), sought to complete his Come Back, America series. This film focused on black and white workers struggling
to overcome their own racism to organize against the Gulf Coast pulp and paper industry. All three films stripped cinema pretense away to create a direct, immediate cinema of social protest.

Rogosin’s last film was *Arab-Israeli Dialogue*, made in 1974. Again, starting out with a more ambitious project, he instead created a spare 40-minute film of a dialogue between Palestinian poet Rashid Hussein and the Israeli journalist Amos Kenan. Shot in two afternoons and combined with footage that Rogosin had shot in Israel in 1953, the film is a meaningful plea for peace and understanding.

Rogosin spent the next sixteen years trying to develop new projects, including a musical feature, *Noa Noa*, based on Paul Gauguin’s autobiographical book on Tahiti, and a police movie, *The Big Apple*, written by John Briley. Through it all, he remained devoted to a cinema of truth and meaning. After his death he was buried in the Forever Hollywood Cemetery — an ironic end for one of cinema’s great independents.

In a 2001 article about Robert Flaherty published after his death, Lionel Rogosin wrote these prophetic words:

> Flaherty is relatively unknown today, but perhaps his work will re-emerge in the future, like the work of Villa Lobos, who said: “I write letters to the future, but nobody answers them.”

Lionel Rogosin was a filmmaker whose work was always ahead of its time and misunderstood by many. Only now, can we appreciate the courage of his life and the genius of his films.

### Influence Abroad

In the fifty years since its release, *Come Back Africa* has become an essential part of South African history. Its depiction of Sophiatown is the only detailed record of its culture before it was destroyed and of its politics before many of its leaders went to prison or to exile. It was also the only film up until *Mapantsula* in 1988 that placed the Africans at the center of the story rather than experienced through the eyes of well-meaning white liberals.

At the time of his death, Rogosin was working on an oral history of anti-apartheid revolutionaries in South Africa.

In an interview with the *New York Times* some years ago, Rogosin noted that his films were more influential around the world than in America.

> “It’s funny, but internationally my films are well-known,” he said. “And even influential. *Come Back, Africa*, for example has been shown all over Africa . . . and I’ve been told by African filmmakers that it influenced and started the whole cinema movement there.

> “That’s rewarding, to know that you’ve influenced an entire continent’s movie making.”

In the last 15 years of his life, Rogosin wrote about many subjects, including a wide range of essays and book projects. Lionel Rogosin died on December 8, 2000 and was buried in the Forever Hollywood cemetery on Santa Monica Boulevard in Los Angeles.

Rogosin is survived by two sons: Michael, of Angers, France and Daniel, of Los Angeles, California, as well as three grandchildren.
Interview with Lionel Rogosin


Could you tell me about your background?

I was born in New York City; but when I was fairly young, we moved to Port Washington [on New York’s Long Island]. It was suburban, but there was the Bay and the Sound. I did a lot of fishing and boating. When I became a film person, I changed my interests from nature to cinema.

Do you see nature and cinema as opposites?

No, I see them as very close. For me, cinema is a way of seeing nature. It’s like being a painter. It’s just that I don’t see landscapes — I see people. I’d love to make a film about the sea, though. That’s one of my dreams, but I’ve never come close to it. It’s such an incredible subject for cinema.

When you were growing up, did you think you would become a filmmaker?

No, I didn’t have the slightest idea. I had seen Flaherty’s Man of Aran when I was very young — about 12, I think — and I was very excited by it. The film inspired me. I would say that was the beginning, though I wasn’t conscious of it. It’s interesting that the film is about the sea. Of course, it’s also Flaherty. He was an important filmmaker for me.

When you started making films, were you conscious of being part of a documentary tradition?

Yes, though I don’t like the word documentary. It’s an inaccurate word. I don’t know why Grierson ever used it. To call a documentary “the creative expression of reality” just doesn’t make sense. Creative expression of reality is not documentary, which means document, or fact. Even cinema vérité, which is not my kind of film, is a better choice of words. It’s not so deadening as “documentary.” Let’s just say that when I started, I was working in Flaherty’s and De Sica’s “direction.” I’d seen the neorealist films after the War, and what I was aiming for was to fuse the two genres — Flaherty’s poetic films and the fictional narratives of the neorealists — which is what Come Back, Africa is, hopefully.

So, one day you decided to become a filmmaker?

Pretty much. I was working in a corporation, and I’d accumulated enough money to make On The Bowery. It was a self-financed, low-budget production.…

How did you raise the money for Come Back, Africa?

I didn’t make any money from On The Bowery, but I had something of a reputation, so I was able to raise about two-thirds of the money. It was also very inexpensive. Filming in South Africa cost very little, except for travel.

Did you consider yourself a radical filmmaker, someone who wanted to promote social change?

That was my aim… Unfortunately, Come Back, Africa has never been shown on television here. If we had a consistent television outlet, we could have continued to make films. By “we,” I mean all the filmmakers making social films, from 1960 till today.…

You’ve logged over 30 years experience as an independent filmmaker. If you were going to give advice to filmmakers today, what would it be?

First, I’d have to say that I don’t have any easy answers. I don’t have any choice. I can’t stop trying to make films. If I could write novels, maybe I would do that. It’s a tough question. Maybe living in another country is important. It helps you see clearer. You need experience with life. You can’t be an artist if you only know your art… There’s a passage from Dostoevsky that means a lot to me: “Man is an enigma. This enigma must be solved. And if you spend all your life at it, don’t say you have wasted your time. I occupy myself with this enigma because I wish to be a man.” I’m not saying that every filmmaker should think of that, and make it his aim; but it’s a pretty incredible concept.
Carl Lerner, who edited some of America’s best-known films, died Sunday in University Hospital after a long illness. He was 61 years old and lived at 33-60 21st Avenue, Long Island City, Queens.

Mr. Lerner’s credits included *Klute*, with Jane Fonda; *The Swimmer*, with Burt Lancaster; *Requiem for a Heavyweight*, with Anthony Quinn; *Middle of the Night*, with Kim Novak and Fredric March; *The Fugitive Kind*, with Marlon Brando and Anna Magnani; *The Goddess*, with Kim Stanley and Lloyd Bridges, and *12 Angry Men*.

He had directed commercial and industrial films, and was director and editor of *Black Like Me*, starring James Whitmore.

Mr. Lerner had taught film technique at City College, New York University, the School of Visual Arts and other institutions, and had written many articles on the subject.

In an article in *Film Comment*, he said:

“The most characteristic aspect of film is its inherent flexibility…. Film is marvelous — you can move it, you can change it, you can make juxtapose it, you can make it slower, you can make it faster…

“The editor is obviously of enormous importance, and his function varies from film to film. Essentially, the editor is an interpreter of the film, is the interpreter of the material that has passed through the camera. He exercises a great influence on the final character of the film, but not nearly as great as what happens in front of the camera.”

Mr. Lerner was born in Philadelphia, where he received B.A. and M.A. degrees in 1933-34 in theater arts from Temple University. He worked in summer stock while in college and later in community theater activities in Philadelphia and New York.

But his interest turned to films, and he hitchhiked to the West Coast and became an apprentice in the editing department of Columbia Pictures. He rose rapidly to assistant, working with top editors in Hollywood, then left to freelance.

He assisted Danny Mandel on the award-winning *Best Years of our Lives*, he was the last of several editors called in on Howard Hawks’ *Red River* and soon afterward was summoned to New York to edit a Paul Henreid vehicle, *So Young, So Bad*.

After several low-budget mystery films, he began working on the type of assignments he had been seeking. He went on to do Franchot Tone’s *Uncle Vanya*, pictures for Sidney Lumet and David Susskind and by Paddy Chayevsky. He worked with Lionel Rogosin in *On the Bowery* and *Come Back, Africa*.

Mr. Lerner was a charter member of Film Editors Local 776. Survivors include his widow, Dr. Gerda Lerner, a historian; a son, Daniel, and a daughter, Stephanie.
Lewis Nkosi
December 5, 1936 – September 5, 2010

Nkosi in the newsroom of Drum in 1958. Photograph: Jürgen Schadeberg

“... and ah, how I miss that Angriest Angry Young Man, Lewis Nkosi.” - Casey ‘Kid’ Motsisi, Drum, March 1963.

Lewis Nkosi worked for many years in Durban, South Africa. Nkosi—which means “king” in Zulu—was born in 1936 in the Durban township of Chesterville Kwa-Zulu Natal, the only child of parents Samson and Christine. Orphaned at 10, he was brought up by his grandmother, Esther. Educated at M. L. Sultan Technical College in Durban, at the age of 18 he started working for the magazine Ilanga lase Natal in Durban. A year later, he moved to Johannesburg to start work at Drum magazine. In his 1965 book Home and Exile and Other Selections, he portrayed his fellow journalists as “the new Africans, cut adrift from the tribal reserve—urbanized, eager, fast-talking and brash”—this also describes Nkosi himself. The Drum journalists were dedicated to exposing the injustices of apartheid; the proprietor, Jim Bailey, and his editor, Sylvester Stein, were faced with constant pressure from the authorities and severe restrictions due to publishing regulations found in the Suppression of Communism Act passed in the 1950s.

In 1961, Nkosi received a Nieman journalism scholarship to study at Harvard. Denied a passport to travel by the South African government, he then applied for a one-way exit permit, and thus began thirty years in exile. He became an editor for New African magazine in London and NET in the United States, and a Professor of Literature, holding positions at the University of Wyoming, the University of California, Irvine, and universities in Zambia and Poland.

Nkosi’s work includes two plays and three novels. He presented Come Back, Africa at Bologna’s II Cinema Ritrovato and the London Film Festival when the film was restored a few years ago. He died in 2010 in Houghton, Johannesburg from a long-term illness.

His publisher, Annari van der Merwe said to Book Southern Africa on his death:

*If I think about Lewis, two things come to mind: the brilliance of the man’s mind, and his sense of irony—of self-irony. And of course he was quite naughty, but endearingly so. For all his bravado, he was sensitive in a way that few men truly are. There was a real empathy with people—and he had a very broad perspective, from having lived in a different cultural environment for so many years. The devil inside him prevented him from taking things too literally. It’s difficult to think of somebody so vibrant not with us any longer. He will be greatly missed.*
William “Bloke” Modisane
August 28, 1923 – March 1, 1986

William “Bloke” Modisane was born on August 28, 1923. He grew up in Sophiatown, a multiracial suburb in Johannesburg. His father was murdered, and his sister died from malnutrition at a very young age. His mother resorted to running a shebeen in order to provide the family with means to live. Modisane described his situation:

My mother accepted her life, and I suppose, so did the other shebeen queens; they chose this life and accommodated the hazards. My mother wanted a better life for her children, a kind of insurance against poverty by trying to give me a prestige profession, and if necessary would go to jail whilst doing it. (Modisane, Blame Me on History)

Modisane worked for a while at Vanguard bookshop, which was owned by a former trade unionist. He later joined Drum, at the time when the magazine was known for investigative journalism that exposed horrific South African prison and farm conditions. He was part of a team of writers that included Henry Nxumalo, Can Themba, Es’kia Mphahlele and Lewis Nkosi, all skilled literary writers. He also worked as a jazz critic for the Golden City Post, the Johannesburg weekly tabloid (Drum's sister publication). It was from the Leslie Charteris thriller novels featuring the Saint that he got his nickname “Bloke”. While working for Drum he used his position to advance the objectives of the non-racial Union of South Africa Artists and the Arts Federation.

His short stories, The Dignity of Begging, The Fighter who wore Skirts and The Respectable Pickpocket, were published by Drum. They featured a self-taught intellectual facing powerlessness and alienation in the face of government repression. Modisane was part of the African Theatre Workshop, and played Shark in the first production of Athol Fugard's play, No-Good Friday. Fugard said, “The journalist Benjie Pogrund was the best man at my wedding and he took me to Sophiatown and I met this incredible galaxy of young writers, musicians and actors, Can Themba, Bloke Modisane, Lewis Nkosi. Sophiatown was already under threat. It was bulldozed and turned into Triomf, but the Church of the Resurrection is still standing, a monument that bears witness to the time.”

In 1959, Modisane left South Africa for England. There in 1963 he published Blame Me on History, similar in several respects to Can Themba's short story Requiem for Sophiatown. The black neighborhood was destroyed in the late 1950s. Blame Me on History was an examination of what apartheid does to the character and self-esteem of the educated black man. The book was banned in South Africa in 1966. In exile, he worked as a writer, actor, and broadcaster; he also starred in Jean Genet’s The Blacks at the Royal Court Theatre. He appeared, uncredited, in the 1964 movie Guns at Batasi, starring Richard Attenborough and Mia Farrow. In the 1968 action film Dark of the Sun, Modisane had a small but memorable supporting role as Corporal Kataki, a sensitive soldier caught up in the rage and horror of the 1960s Congo civil wars.

He died in Dortmund, West Germany in 1986 at the age of 63. He was one of South Africa’s finest writers and intellectuals.
Bloke Modisane on the making of *Come Back, Africa*

Only the reckless daring of a man who had the conviction to film *On the Bowery* could have risked so much to make *Come Back, Africa*. Lionel Rogosin dug deep to find his story, penetrated the squalor of the locations to feel the heart-beat of the Africans. He went into the shebeens, the illicit drinking dens, and listened as his subjects spoke, sometimes with bitterness and at times with humor, about the injustice, the misery, the poverty that marked their lives. He got drunk with them, and I remember that one evening we dragged him through a ceremony and made him an honorary Zulu and taught him to do the Zulu war dance.

By the time he was ready to shoot his film we had conditioned him to see black, to feel black and to react black.

But for Lionel Rogosin to be black meant he had to adopt all the problems that attend that color, and it never occurred to me that morning when he showed up at the office where I worked that I was to be enmeshed in a gigantic fraud, in a colossal challenge that was to lose me my job and earn me a friend for life.

I was a working journalist on DRUM magazine when I met Lionel Rogosin. He walked up to my desk and said, “My name is Rogosin, a mutual friend asked me to look you up.” He told me about his project, and I listened courteously. I had met too many people who wanted to make films, dishonest people, who had taken African artists for a joy ride at very little cost. Exploitation of black talent by white opportunists is an old story. So I listened to his story and did not believe a word he said.

**THE MERRY-GO-ROUND**

He was having trouble with the Government over visas for his crew, two cameramen and a sound engineer, and for some reason, that was all I needed to believe him — anybody in trouble with the South African Government was my friend. Lionel Rogosin had to submit to the authorities details of the kind of film he was doing. After Ed. G. [sic] Murrow’s film *African Conflict*, American filmmakers were suspect.

Thus began the great merry-go-round. At one time he was making a travelogue, but the Government wanted to see his commission; the actual contract. Lionel Rogosin had to live that lie through and produce a contract, a vague, noncommittal commission from an airline company that did not want to be involved. That was thrown out. Then he decided to film an African musical. He took this story to Pretoria, South Africa’s executive capital, and weaved a near-plausible tale of presenting the music of Africa to the world, to show that Africans were basically a happy people.

To support his story he went round the locations shooting scenes of penny-whistle troupes, gum-boot dancers, singing troupes, mine dancers, and shot hundreds of feet of film which he was preparing to screen for the department of the interior if ever challenged to do so. The police followed him through the townships, playing it cloak-and-dagger, and reporting all his moves. It came to be quite a game playing up to them.

Three months of this fooling and traveling the 72 miles to Pretoria every other day, the visas were finally granted. But by this time Lionel Rogosin had fed the white papers with a story that he was impressed with Denys Reitz’s book, “The Commando,” and that he wanted to make a film of it. “The Commando” is a loaded account of the Afrikaner war against the English … the Boer War. The newspapers were enthusiastic over the project, and the Government’s attitude began to change.

From Zurich came Walter Wettler, sound, and Ernst Artaria, camera man, and from Israel came Emil Knebel, cameraman.

For a while the police seemed to be off our backs, and Lionel Rogosin and I set upon casting for the film. He did not want professional actors, but he wanted faces, and for two months we looked at faces in the bus queues, in the streets, at the cinemas. We went everywhere looking for a face in the crowd. I began to develop a feel for faces, to set them apart, but compared to Lionel Rogosin, I was in the kindergarten league.

I could not keep up with Lionel Rogosin, being up in the morning and looking at every face that came out at the “native’s Entrance” of Johannesburg’s Park Station. He bought space in a newspaper and we spent a whole
afternoon looking at faces and interviewing probable, but Lionel was not satisfied. He want back to the bus queues and the ironic part of it all was that as Lionel picked a face, the African would be terrified and just run — always a man who did not have a Pass, that document of oppression which puts 1,250,000 African males in jail every year. Others suspected he was a Bethal farmer, those notorious traffickers in human lives who lure Africans to jobs with fantastic salaries, the trick labor contracts which are concluded in a rush, then the horror of being shanghaied to a farm and working under slave conditions for anything up to one-and-sixpence a day. As a rule Africans don’t talk to strange white men, especially those who are seemingly polite. Being in his company marked me as a traitor.

Then, one morning, he rushed up to me with the exciting news that he had found the face he was looking for, but in actual fact he had found more than a face or an actor. He had found Zacharia himself, a country man who had been forced to come to Johannesburg because the land couldn’t support his needs. It was a miracle find. Zacharia didn’t have to act the part — he just had to be himself, the simple rural African: inarticulate, halting in speech, coarse, very little education, but a tremendous man with a quiet dignity and integrity. And since no dialogue was written into the script he had to improvise all his lines. The words were his own, and so was the grammar and usage.

The terrifying scene at the end… was even more agonizing to watch. The script called for him to break down mentally, and in a rage of hysteria to smash up the crockery. The crack-up of the character and the man were so closely linked that we were as terrified at being present at the destruction of a man. It was a nightmare that we could not stop or turn our faces from, and by the time Lionel shouted “Cut!” we were sick. The scene had come to close to the real thing and it was printed after only two takes.

The tension and the strain began to show on Lionel’s face. He was behind schedule, his own visa was about to expire and he feared that the Government would kick him out of the country. So he prepared for this eventuality. We held a script conference: Lionel, a young journalist friend of mine called Lewis Nkosi and I, sweated over the script. Discussed, argued and battled at it for hours until we were all satisfied. After this Lionel shot all his exterior shots, the documentary bits that couldn’t be done anywhere else.

The cameras were loaded on to cars. The cameras were covered with blankets with the photographers crouching behind them, and all the time there was a look-out. The look-out would give the signal and the blankets would go over the cameras and the cars would drive away with Lionel and his white crew looking like tourists out to see how the other half, or rather, how the other three-quarters lived. Soon as the police were gone off would come the blankets and shooting resumed, and when he was doing the safe scenes, like the itinerant musicians or a wedding, the cameras would be mounted on an open van, and sometimes we had the police come round to watch. And always at this point Lionel couldn’t resist the temptation of getting the police to help.

Tongue in cheek, he would walk up to them and ask if it was safe for him to shoot in the locations … was his equipment safe? Was there any danger of being knifed or fobbed? At which point the police would advise him to be careful, and in the end he would have the police controlling the crowds that are always drawn by the making of a film. With the police in there keeping the crowd away from the camera, Lionel would have a whole day of uninterrupted work. And just before sundown he would be advised to stop working because the “Natives” would be drunk and troublesome.

It never failed, and Lewis Nkosi and I would die laughing.

I suppose I should not admit to such a thing in print … question of honor and all that, but it hadn’t occurred to me that I was capable of unsophisticated lies. A quality of sorts that Lionel and I shared with such generous helpings. People were always asking about the film; they wanted to know what it was all about, and we told them. It would be a different story every time, until I couldn’t remember which friend I had told which lie. It was stimulating to find a co-conspirator in Lionel Rogosin.

The story of the film was top-secret — not even the actors were told: this more as a protection to them rather than a case of trust. If the actors didn’t know, then perhaps it would be easier for them in the event of reprisal tactics by the police. Zacharia was blissfully ignorant and religiously dogmatic: he never asked questions, just did what was asked of him. The others were sophisticated enough to know and realize the time for ignorance.
After all the tensions and the backbreaking speed of shooting as much as could be done, Lionel and his wife, Eli, got extensions on the visas. And with the endorsement of goodwill in his favor, Lionel became daring. He wanted to shoot the mine sequences, to go down a real mine and shoot the sequences of the training of new recruits, of the men going down the mines, in another world of tunnels and men with flashlights on their foreheads, the actual drilling for gold. And that, for me at any rate, was a high point in the film.

The black of the skin of the miners seemed to flow into the black of the tunnels, and the flashlights on the helmets seemed to move without bodies. Moving one behind the other, and photographed in long shots, gave the impression of a long snake winding in the dark. The Africans scratched at the bowels of the earth for the gold that is the symbol of South Africa’s white prosperity and the fundamental of the greed that oppresses them.

Lionel Rogosin wormed his way into the confidence of a minor official with a glowing account of making a film of South African gold mining, of showing the high technological standard of mining, its efficiency in transforming, by training, rural savages into proficient miners. And so the mine sequences were photographed — a rare privilege to be awarded to a foreign filmmaker.

The big interior scene, the one featuring Johannesburg’s black intellectuals in a shebeen, was tricky and in a way, the most dangerous. Lionel wanted it to be authentic … the atmosphere of a shebeen, real liquor, real-life intellectual drunks, a real-life shebeen queen, and a genuine look-out for the police. Liquor laws in South Africa were emphatic: Africans are forbidden to drink by law. This does not, of course, mean that Africans don’t drink — in fact, eighty per cent of all liquors distilled in South Africa find their way into the townships. The Africans drink undercover.

Lionel supplied the liquor—illegally, of course, and where and whenever there are free drinks going you’ll find Can Themba, Morris Hugh, Lewis Nkosi, Bloke Modisane and other brethren of the Bacchus community, that a mutual friend, Nimrod Mkele, describes as: displaced intellectuals in search of a morality. With all immodesty I wish to add that that scene was the most authentic, for at the end when the shebeen queen throws us out, the wobbling and the leaning on each other was the real thing. And the reason, at all, that the scene came to an end was due to the under-sight of Lionel Rogosin who had under-catered.

If the police had surprised that sequence there would have been no Come Back, Africa; Lionel would have been jailed for supplying liquor to Natives, and the Natives would have been convicted of being in possession of liquor. But we were lucky: we had a good look-out and the scene was shot in the most improbably place ever — in the class-room of a mission school on mission grounds.

We couldn’t find a Sophiatown room, preferably a shebeen, big enough for two cameras to truck back and forward, and after days of sweating out the problem I suggested the mission school.

Lionel Rogosin’s final problem was to find processing laboratories that would develop his films without a special copy being rushed to the security police. The only one technically equipped to do the job was at Irene, a suburb of Pretoria, and the studio was known to have a big contract with the state information department. So only the safe reels were sent there for development and then rushed to New York for processing, but the dynamite was sent straight to New York.

When it was all over and the rushes sent to New York we had a big illegal party, where white and black drank together, danced together and got drunk together, and I think I saw Lionel Rogosin smile genuinely: not just with the mouth, but with the eyes, the face, and his whole body. He had survived it all, and the hoax, the lies, the deceptions were all justified in his bold stating of the African’s case.
Can Themba
1924—1968

(Obituary written by Lewis Nkosi, published in Can Themba’s The Will to Die)

“The son of a bitch had no business to die…” – Can Themba at a friend’s funeral.

Time, frustration and despair, with their attendant corrosive drugs—alcohol and suicide—are taking a toll on South African writers. Nat Nakasa. Ingrid Jonker. Now Can Themba. They are all surrendering to something infinitely more difficult to describe. Their deaths are not simply natural deaths even when they are technically so; for even though they do not die at the end of a bullet, flattened against some executioner’s wall, their anguish is in so many ways related to the anguish of the people of South Africa. For those of them, like Nat Nakasa and Ingrid Jonker, who committed suicide, this is clear enough; but Can Themba’s own anguish and despair led to a suicidal kind of living which was bound to destroy his life at a relatively young age.

At any rate, the deaths of our writers are sometimes more dramatic than most deaths but are nonetheless part of the slow undramatic death of many. Nat Nakasa and Can Themba, personal friends and former colleagues, I knew better than most. I lived in the same house with both of them at different times. After they are gone it seems to me now that there was always something strangely sinister and altogether ominous in their form of detachment and the desperate wit they cultivated, in the mocking cynicism of the one and the love of irony of the other. Each in his own way tried to reduce the South African problem into some form of manageable game one plays constantly with authority without winning, but without losing either…

…For Can Themba the incursion into ‘white’ Johannesburg was, so to speak, a kind of temporary surfacing from what he has elsewhere described as ‘the swarming, cacophonous, strutting, brawling, vibrating life’ of the African township—in his case, Sophiatown. Indeed, Can Themba’s agony accentuates the razing to the ground of Sophiatown by the government and the disappearance of many of its folk institutions—the extravagant folk heroes and heroines, shebeens and shebeen queens, singers, nice-time girls, now dispersed by government order to the sprawling, camp-like location ghettos farther out of town. Of the destruction of Sophiatown he has written movingly in ‘Requiem for Sophiatown.’

Can Themba’s most splendid moments of journalism were therefore the celebration of this life, which is not to say he wished for the continuance of slum conditions in order to engender a spurious vitality but because, for Can Themba, the African township represented the strength and the will to survive by ordinary masses of the African people. In its own quiet way the township represented a dogged defiance against official persecution, for in the
township the moments of splendor were very splendid indeed, surpassing anything white Johannesburg could offer…

…Irony cannot defeat a brutal and oppressive regime; it can only assist for a while in concealing the pain and the wounds until the anguish is too deep and unbearable to be contained within a perpetual self-contemplating irony. Nat Nakasa finally committed suicide in New York and no testimony yet offered about his conduct in the last days before his death will give us any clue as to the actual spiritual dilemmas, the immensity in which they presented themselves to him, just before he reached the ultimate of his exile—suicide.

Can Themba, on the other hand, had always disguised his own pain behind a devil-may-take-the-hindlegs kind of attitude and a prodigous reliance on alcohol as a drug. His drinking was phenomenal…His death is not such a mystery to me though it seems again one of the most wasteful deaths we’ve had in these last three years. The South African actor who passed the news on to me said simply: ‘His heart just stopped!’ His wife was later quoted as saying she would not mourn him because Can Themba and she had made a vow not to mourn each other when either of them died. He was living in Swaziland at the time, just across the border from South Africa. Like many of our writers, he was already banned from publishing or being quoted in any South African newspaper or publication. This in itself must have been a considerable blow to a writer who considered himself the poet laureate of the urban township of South Africa or its new vital, literate proletariat.

Somewhat taller than average, slender, with an impish grin which hovered between self-deprecation and the mockery of others, he gave the impression of a nimble delighted observer, always on the look-out for drama, excitement and fun. He was also a fast talker, a very deft, quick thinker with an equal facility for the apt, if outrageous, phrase. His excitement about ideas, his delight in throwing them up himself or sharing the company of those whose primary interest was ideas, showed him to be first and foremost an intellectual in the original sense of that word. For him the pursuit of ideas was not just an abstract humorless activity: it was a form of play. Intellectual activity was nothing if not fun, which led some to regard him as flippant, reckless and irresponsible. For though he had studied English and philosophy, he eschewed the turgid, the solemn and the pretentiously weighty language of those who merely wish to sound abstruse. He lent to his thoughts the same vivid imagery, sharp staccato rhythm of the township language of the tsotsi, because he himself was the supreme intellectual tsotsi of them all, always, in the words of the blues singer, ‘raising hell in the neighborhood.’ The neighborhood in which he raised hell was that somber, fearful community of the intellect so hideously terrorized by the political regime in South Africa.

Yet in scrutinizing, first, Nat Nakasa’s writings one finds in it nothing powerful or astonishing; indeed, one is largely disappointed. There are niggling flashes of brilliance but it is all rather of the order of the breakfast-table columnist, deft, witty, ironical, but nothing more; his reading is minimal. But then he was young and might have developed as he matured.

Can Themba’s actual achievements are more disappointing because his learning and reading were more substantial and his talent proven; but he chose to confine his brilliance to journalism of an insubstantial kind. It is almost certain that had Can Themba chosen to write a book on South Africa, it would not only have been an interesting and to use an American word ‘insightful’ book, but it might have revealed a complex and refined talent for verbalizing the African mood. And no doubt, such a book would have been a valuable addition to the literature of South Africa, As it is, we mourn a talent largely misused or neglected; we mourn what might have been. But to have known Themba, to have heard him speak, is to have known a mind both vigorous and informed, shaped by the city as few other minds are in rest of Africa.

Lewis Nkosi
One of South Africa’s celebrated singers Miriam “Mama” Makeba has died. Makeba died in Italy overnight aged 76 after being taken ill following a concert near the southern Italian town of Caserta, reports say.

Makeba was the legendary voice of the African continent, who became a symbol of the fight against apartheid in her home country. She died overnight after taking part in a concert for Roberto Saviano, a writer threatened with death by the Mafia.

After singing for half an hour for the young author of Gomorrah at Castel Volturro near Naples along with other singers and artistes she was taken ill and was quickly taken to a clinic in Castel Volturro where she died of a heart attack.

SA Foreign Affairs Minister Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma has said paid tribute on behalf of the nation.

“One of the greatest songstresses of our time, Miriam Makeba, has ceased to sing. Miriam Makeba, South Africa’s Goodwill Ambassador died performing what she did best - an ability to communicate a positive message through the art of singing.”

“Throughout her life, Mama Makeba communicated a positive message to the world about the struggle of the people of South Africa and the certainty of victory over the dark forces of apartheid colonialism through the art of song.”
Biography

According to a biography published on the BBC, Miriam Makeba, who was popularly known as Mama Africa, was born in Johannesburg on 4 March 1932 and was a prominent figure in the struggle against apartheid.

Her singing career started in the 1950s, when she began mixing jazz with traditional South African songs. She came to international attention in 1959 during a tour of the United States with the South African group The Manhattan Brothers.

She was forced into exile soon after when her passport was revoked, after starring in an anti-apartheid documentary, and did not return to her native country until Nelson Mandela was released from prison.

Miriam Makeba was the first black African woman to win a Grammy Award, which she shared with Harry Belafonte in 1965. She was African music’s first world star, blending different styles long before the phrase “world music” was coined.

After her divorce from fellow South African musician Hugh Masekela, she married American civil rights activist Stokely Carmichael.

It was while living in exile in the US that she released her most famous songs, “Pata, Pata” and “The Click Song.”

It was because of her dedication to her home continent that Miriam Makeba became known as Mama Africa.

In 1987 she appeared on Paul Simon’s Graceland tour and in 1992 she had a leading role in the film Sarafina!

Africa mourns the death of a legend.

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### Lakutshon Ilanga sung by Miriam Makeba

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When the sun sets,</th>
<th>in the houses and streets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>and the cattle come back</td>
<td>and even in the hospitals and jails.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think of you.</td>
<td>I will look for you until I find you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sun sets and the moon rises</td>
<td>When the sun sets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on the horizon of the sea.</td>
<td>and the cattle come back,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When the birds come back</td>
<td>I think about you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and the sun sets.</td>
<td>When the sun sets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And I went looking for you</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Into Yam sung by Miriam Makeba

| I love my baby even if he drinks too much. | He's my baby. He's my baby. |
| I love him, I love him. | He was fine when he left Johannesburg |
| He left home to go to Cape Town | but when he got to Cape Town he met his ruin. |
| There he met his ruin. | He's my baby even though he drinks too much. |
| I love my baby even if he drinks too much. | He's the one I love. He works for me. |
| My baby is my baby | Leave my baby alone, Mother. |
| and I like him even if he drinks too much. | He works for me. |
| Don't say a word, Mother. | Leave my baby alone. |
Lionel Rogosin was very interested in portraying the real South Africa, especially its culture. So he ensured that *Come Back, Africa* would document the incredible and richly varied music of the country, specifically that of young street musicians playing tin whistles as well as the music performed in the shebeens of Sophiatown.

“One of the first Sundays that we were in Johannesburg we walked around the city, which was almost completely empty, until suddenly we heard music in the distance. Walking on, we found a band of African children. Here and there throughout the city we found similar groups, and suddenly music seemed to be all around us.” — from *A Man Possessed*, by Lionel Rogosin.

At the time of the film’s production, Sophiatown, one of the only mixed-race sections of Johannesburg, served as the center for black culture in the city. The establishment of “black locations” had largely contributed to the creation and popularization of street music, which became a focus of black urban life. Specifically, Sophiatown was a place of artistry; there, many musicians, poets, playwrights, and journalists gained fame.

The young boys featured in the film playing tin whistles, or pennywhistles, created a genre among themselves. This genre was named *kwela*, and originated as a warning and a disguise against the police vans whose sirens sound very similar. The whistle was typically made out of metal and was originally made as a substitute for a reed flute. When played in a group, the whistles could imitate the sounds of brass bands, reed sounds, and even percussive instruments. African swing textures and an ostinato foundation (a repetitive musical pattern) are typical of the genre. The sounds made by these penny whistlers were often paired with vocal jazz improvisation to contribute even further to the genre.

In 2011, it was revealed that one of the young boys in the film is Lulu Masilela, a well-known jazz saxophonist who played for The Movers in the 1970s and after that, joined Jonhjon Mkhalali as part of the Boyoyo Boys. The two of
them are most famous for writing *Gumboots*. After hearing a recording of the instrumental, Paul Simon wrote lyrics for the song, asked them to play on his version, and it became part of the legendary *Graceland* album.

*Come Back, Africa* also featured music performed on the inside of vibrant Sophiatown life. While *kwela* was played in the streets, *marabi* was another genre altogether, synthesized from many other musical forms including vocal and instrumental music, religious and secular music, and music from Africa, Europe, and America. Characterized by sections of African polyphony, a Western I-IV-V chord progression, and repetitive sections of traditional part singing and harmonies, *marabi* was a hybrid of western and African music played under the radar at secret, boisterous *shebeens*.

Genres of music in Sophiatown widely meshed together to form a more general genre called *mbaqanga*, a mix of *marabi*, *kwela*, and Western jazz. But over time, this genre—much like South Africa itself—was manipulated, controlled, and taken advantage of. White-owned recording industries and studios hired musicians cheaply to play duplicates of other labels’ successes, and the genre developed in this direction under specifications from these recording studios. But authenticity and brilliance remained in the townships themselves, and in the recordings produced by the black community—especially as demonstrated by Miriam Makeba and her presence in *Come Back, Africa*.

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**An American in Sophiatown**

Conceived and Produced by ......................... Michael Ariel Rogosin
Written by ..................................................... Michael Rogosin and Lloyd Ross
Directed and edited by ................................. Lloyd Ross
Co-produced by ................................. Daniel Rogosin, Davide Andriole & Michael Caine
Produced in South Africa by ..................... Reedwaan Vally
Bloke Modisane’s words read by ............... Shunna Pillay
Music by ...................................................... Jeff Gardner

With: Lewis Nkosi, Emil Knebel, Lorenza Mazzetti, Jonas Mekas, Myrtle Berman, Elinor Hart Rogosin, Isabel Balseiro, Ntongela Masilela.


Michael Rogosin is a painter/artist who lives with his wife and two children in France. He has directed four acclaimed documentaries about his father Lionel’s films, and is presently completing a feature about the Rogosin family. He is the president of Rogosin Heritage, and has helped preserve his father’s films.
Milestone Film & Video

Milestone enters its 22nd year of operations with a reputation for releasing classic cinema masterpieces, new foreign films, groundbreaking documentaries and American independent features. Thanks to the company’s work in rediscovering and releasing important films such as Charles Burnett’s *Killer of Sheep*, Kent Mackenzie’s *The Exiles*, Lionel Rogosin’s *On the Bowery*, Mikhail Kalatozov’s *I Am Cuba*, Marcel Ophuls’s *The Sorrow and the Pity*, the Mariposa Film Group’s *Word is Out* and Alfred Hitchcock’s *Bon Voyage* and *Aventure Malgache*, Milestone has long occupied a position as one of the country’s most influential independent distributors.

In 1995, Milestone received the first Special Archival Award from the National Society of Film Critics for its restoration and release of *I Am Cuba*. Manohla Dargis, then at the *LA Weekly*, chose Milestone as the 1999 “Indie Distributor of the Year.” In 2004, the National Society of Film Critics again awarded Milestone with a Film Heritage award. That same year the International Film Seminars presented the company its prestigious Leo Award and the New York Film Critics Circle voted a Special Award “in honor of 15 years of restoring classic films.” In November 2007, Milestone was awarded the Fort Lee Film Commission’s first Lewis Selznick Award for contributions to film history. Milestone/Millarium won Best Rediscovery from the II Cinema Ritrovato DVD Awards for its release of *Winter Soldier* in 2006 and again in 2010 for *The Exiles*.

In January 2008, the Los Angeles Film Critics Association chose to give its first Legacy of Cinema Award to Dennis Doros and Amy Heller of Milestone Film & Video “for their tireless efforts on behalf of film restoration and preservation.” And in March 2008, Milestone became an Anthology Film Archive’s Film Preservation honoree. In 2009, Dennis Doros was elected as one of the Directors of the Board of the Association of the Moving Image Archivists and established the organization’s press office in 2010.

In 2011, Milestone was the first distributor ever chosen for two Film Heritage Awards in the same year by the National Society of Film Critics for the release of *On the Bowery* and *Word is Out*. The American Library Association also selected *Word is Out* for their Notable Videos for Adult, the first classic film ever so chosen.

Important contemporary artists who have co-presented Milestone restorations include Martin Scorsese, Francis Ford Coppola, Barbara Kopple, Woody Allen, Steven Soderbergh, Thelma Schoonmaker, Jonathan Demme, Dustin Hoffman, Charles Burnett and Sherman Alexie.

“They care and they love movies.” — Martin Scorsese

Milestone Would Like to Thank the Following:

- Michael Rogosin and family
- Daniel Rogosin and family
- GianLuca Farinelli, Cineteca del Comune di Bologna
- Andrea Meneghelli, Cineteca del Comune di Bologna
- Antonio Volpone, Cineteca del Comune di Bologna
- Davide Pozzi, Cineteca del Comune di Bologna
- Sara Rognoni, Cineteca del Comune di Bologna
- Andrew Lampert, Anthology Film Archives
- Jonas Mekas, Anthology Film Archives
- Robert Haller, Anthology Film Archives
- John Mhiriphiri, Anthology Film Archives
- Bruce Goldstein and Jenny Jediny, Film Forum
- Scott Eyman and Lynn Kalber
- Association of Moving Image Archivists ([www.amianet.org](http://www.amianet.org))
- D. Adrian Rothschild (trailer)
- Sarah Szulecki (press kit)
- Scott Meola, Simplicissimus (poster design)
- Oscilloscope Laboratories

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Press kit by Sarah Szulecki.
Last week I saw a motion picture that I'm sure I will never forget. It's called "Come Back, Africa," and was filmed in secrecy a year or two ago in the Union of South Africa by a young American producer named Lionel Rogosin. I wish every adult in the U. S. could see this film.

There are no big Hollywood stars in Rogosin's production. Most of the "actors" in the piece had never before been in front of a camera, and you will be aware of that as you watch the screen. In fact, Rogosin told me the lack of professional gloss in the acting is intentional, for he hoped by using ordinary people from the real-life situation to gain a sense of the raw, naked truth that no studio-fabricated production could hope to reproduce. He has succeeded admirably.

For in this simple, straightforward tale of the everyday life of a human being with black skin in South Africa, Rogosin has peeled back the more obvious headlines and given us a startling insight into what a way of life built upon the fanatic doctrine of white supremacy can be. All of us were shocked by the ruthless shootings, beatings and mass arrests in South Africa in the past few months. But the artistic documentation in "Come Back, Africa" of the slow but relentless stifling of a man's dignity, spirit and humanity itself is, in some ways, even more harrowing. For, multiplied by the millions, this has been going on long before the headlines broke—and is going on today.

I think anyone who sees this film, and open-mindedly identifies with its leading character as he faces the mounting frustrations of his existence, cannot help but be greatly alarmed that such an organized, officially sanctioned system exists in the world today. The last time such a monster was allowed to run wild, we had to fight a world war to stamp it out. When our government and others in the free world continue to do business as usual in gold, diamonds, uranium and lobster tails with another such Hitler-like system, it becomes frightening to think of what could eventually happen.

It is also alarming in another sense. Though the South African pattern does not exist in all details in our own country, the basic ideas of American racial segregation and South African apartheid are one and the same. Few, if any, films have been made which as movingly document the effects of segregation upon Negro Americans. But the Supreme Court recognized the untold human tragedy inherent in the matter when, in its unanimous 1954 decision against the doctrine of "separate but equal," it declared that segregation affects the hearts and minds of Negro children "in a manner unlikely ever to be undone." Thus, the significance of "Come Back, Africa" is just as pertinent here as in South Africa.

I asked Lionel Rogosin why he made this film, since he obviously won't get rich by offering it to U. S. movie distributors. Rogosin—who also produced the prize-winning "On the Bowery" of a few years back—said he didn't get into the film industry to make money, but because he has certain feelings about society. He added: "To me, racism is just about the worst crime there is."

Rogosin went to South Africa on his own and filmed the picture on the pretext of shooting a travelogue. If at any time the police had discovered the true nature of the film, he would undoubtedly have been deported and everyone connected with the film would have been in serious trouble. In fact, several of the whites who aided Rogosin have since had to flee the country, while others have been jailed. Rogosin said he only recently learned of some of this, since the government there has now made it a crime even to tell anybody that someone has been arrested!

"Come Back, Africa" makes a telling point ably and movingly. It is well worth going to see.
COME BACK, ÁFRICA

A FILM OF TERRIBLE BEAUTY

[Poster Image]