

## MOREIRA CHONGUIÇA - The journey to here

With six solo albums behind him and road well-travelled, here we dial it back to reveal Moreira Chonguiça, the saxophonist, composer, producer, ethnomusicologist and social entrepreneur's passion path to accomplishment.

Music chose Moreira Chonguiça at a tender age. First, he picked up a recorder and soon gravitated towards the clarinet, which turned into a five-year tussle at the National School of Music in Maputo. So much so that, aged nine, he stopped attending classes completely.

Fast-forward four short years – now aged 13 and inspired by his father Chonguiça Moreira Chonguiça and uncle Eben Chonguiça's love of jazz – Moreira recommits to the school he ran away from to once again wrestle with his percolating music genius.

With an eye and ear to spot raw talent, his teacher at the National School of Music, Professor Orlando, is the man responsible for identifying, exorcising and baptising the then young man and setting him on a path destined for success.

"If you look at a clarinet and a saxophone, shape-wise, they are two different animals," Moreira says. "And if you look at the volume of reference produced playing the clarinet, there is certainly more saxophone recordings than the former to attest to its appeal."

Mozambique gained its independence in 1975. The ruling regime at the time, Frelimo, remain the ruling party today. "For me, I am a product of that revolution," Moreira reveals. "If only because Frelimo has since that time created six or seven institutions, including the National School of Music, with a view then to roll them out across the entire country. It was a government with a great vision and understanding that the liberation we had just won was realised because of culture, and so they had to continue."

"I didn't go to school to become a musician," Moreira continues. "It was extracurricular, like playing sport. Something for me to do in the afternoon," he recalls. "So, for me at that time, I wouldn't say I had a vision or passion for music, no. It was my afternoon distraction. First the recorder, but the relationship quickly grew when I met Professor Orlando. A very important man in my life and a very important man in Mozambique culture."

In 1975 the government saw the value of sending young Mozambicans to go and study abroad. The country was a communist-socialist state, so it had networks in Korea, Cuba, Russia and Professor Orlando was part of a group that went to study in Russia at the time. When he came back, his learnings were integrated into the National Music School. "An amazing man," Moreira commends. "He has an incredibly deep understanding of classical music and jazz – from the theoretical, right through to history that confirms its greatness."

With the professor's guidance and tutelage, at the age of nine, Moreira made the jump from recorder to the clarinet, the same year he also ran away from the school. "I didn't like it because, being a young boy, all my friends were playing soccer and going to music school made me feel like a mommy's boy," he bashfully admits.

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"Everything I am today is because of family," he adds. "The first time I heard Miles Davis, I was at home," he recalls. "The first time I heard Winston 'Mankunku' Ngozi, I was at home. Led Zeppelin, Fela Kuti, Hugh Masekela and Louis Armstrong, I first heard them all there."

Recalling his growth trajectory, Moreira recalls his uncles, his father's brothers, living with the family. "My uncle Eben was a fantastic bass and acoustic guitar player and loved bossa nova," he retells. "He wrote the song "Mnganami" which appears on my first album *Vol 1 – The Journey*."

His father, along with his brothers belonged to a group involved with music and theatre music. His Uncle (Eben) began to travel a lot and returning from one of his many trips he brought me this VHS cassette of the final 1991 Miles Davis performance in Paris. "I was playing the clarinet at the time," Moreira recalls. "We were transcribing Benny Goodman and the like at the time." That was when he realised the music bug had bitten, Moreira was now properly addicted. "That would be the right word, yes," he agrees.

Remember, Moreira went to music school at the age of seven, ran away at the age of nine and for a full year his father was non-the-wiser, until one day his teacher called his father asking if Moreira was OK, if only because he'd not been seen in class for well over a year at that stage.

Post his father's confrontation, Moreira tells his father that he doesn't like music and so starts Judo training, but remarkably, by himself, he went back to the music school when he was 13.

"When I returned, I had a pretty good idea of what I wanted," he recalls. "It was to play the alto sax. Why? I saw my uncle's video, where I watched and heard Miles Davis, featuring Kenny Garrett playing the same instrument. Up to that point, I had listened to a lot of music, but I had never heard something that touched my heart in a way that the 10-minute solo on "Human Nature" did. That was when I knew that I wanted to play that instrument."

Cutting his musical teeth in live performance was the next critical step in Moreira's growth and sonic evolution. At the Noel Langa jazz club in a Mozambiquan township, Xipamanine, "It was there I got the guts, from a shy boy to an aggressively passionate player," Moreira fondly recalls.

Thanks to a committed professor, a patient father and a loving mother, amongst many others, Moreira's foundation was firmly cast. Since then, his formal biography sights a raft of performances, recordings and philanthropic success.

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With the knowledge he's actively acquired along his rich and often challenging road to success, Moreira has realised that the majority of accomplished alto sax players all started their voyage playing the clarinet. "Saxophone chose me," he admits. "Music chose me. I'm not going to pretend that I know what I am doing or why I am doing it. I just do as I am guided."

Today, it sounds like Moreira is indeed in control. If anything, it's a façade because he's capitulated to his creator, nemesis, call it what you will. "I'm not in control, I'm guided," he recognises. "I'm a very spiritual person. I realise that it may not look like it, if only because there are preconceived ideas of what it means to be spiritual, but for me, I work with energy, and when I ask myself how I landed up here, I planned none of this. I wanted to be a lawyer, but the music was so strong inside me I had no choice but to abide and heed the call."

Backpedal to Moreira's second year studying at UCT, another jump away from music. "How was music going to help me feed my family?" he questioned at the time. "I didn't have sufficient references of Mozambiquan musicians who had succeeded. A house, their kids in a good school, all thanks to music. Thankfully, when I got to South Africa and Cape Town, there were sufficient touchpoints there to convince me otherwise. That said, none of it was easy, even for established players. Then in 2020, a pandemic does a further reset, for us all.

Moreira's never truly planned his pilgrimage. "I work with energy, feeling and of course faith," he confesses. "I use science, experience, and I believe that you cannot do it alone."

Music is the great leveller. It breaks down every barrier. Moreira may not be a qualified lawyer today, but he uses his instrument to achieve not dissimilar goals.

**If the music of Moreira Chonguiça was to be more clinical, devoid of heart and passion, what his body of work represents would all be entirely vacuous.**

Watch any of Moreira's social shares and that unease quickly dissolves. When the music plays, Moreira's possessed. "That's the right understanding for me," he concurs. "Everyone has a signature and I intend showing more of that side of my musical personality in the months and years ahead."

"Energy is my drive," Moreira concludes. Having followed all the steps and ticked all of the boxes the nouveau jazz world holds dear, this musical eccentric is realising his voice, some two decades into a journey, respectful of heritage, but a bit like Miles Davis and those that came before him, presenting a side of music the world has never heard before. Not because he has to, but because he must!

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