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Paula Fourie, *Mr Entertainment: The Story of Taliep Petersen*. Publisher: Pretoria: LAPA Publishers, 2022, 382 pages. ISBN # 978-0-6396-0120-5.

Reviewed by: Muhammed Haron, International Peace College of South Africa.

South Africa's entertainment industry grew dramatically towards the end of the apartheid period and continued to expand throughout the post-apartheid era. During these periods, the industry was gradually influenced by diverse groups, especially people of color. Many of those, such as Abdullah Ebrahim (aka Dollar Brand), Sathima Bea Benjamin, and Johaar Mosavel (not mentioned in this work)—musicians, singers, and dancers who demonstrated their talents locally—were not given due recognition by the discriminatory system. They thus had to make serious decisions about whether to stay in South Africa, which was affected by a battery of bigoted laws, or move elsewhere to showcase their skills as entertainers/performers/artists.

Since the South African apartheid system barred them from earning a good living as entertainers, these artists set their sights on countries far beyond South Africa where they went to ply their trade and earn their keep. While some succeeded in stationing themselves overseas in countries such as the UK and the USA, there were a handful of others who remained behind to eke out a living as 'struggling' entertainers; this crop of individuals was challenged—as indicated earlier—by the inequitable apartheid legal structures—a set of laws that did not permit Blacks (namely, Africans, Coloureds, and Indians) to entertain mixed audiences.

Among the latter group, one can provide a long list of names, and anyone who was familiar with the Cape's growing entertainment industry would agree that Taliep Petersen's name was high up on that list. He was a gifted and multi-talented performer who started his career in the late 1960s when he won a Mr. Entertainer competition (see pp. 62-63). From that period onward, he continued to excel, producing music and musicals; some of these won accolades around the world.

When Taliep Petersen was killed in December 2006 (see Bouzaglou 2006) by his second wife, Najwa Dirk, the Cape community, in particular, was deeply shocked and hurt; they knew him to have been a very jovial and happy-go-lucky Cape Muslim character. By and large, Taliep Petersen was respected and recognized by many in and even outside these circles as a wonderful singer and songwriter.

Up until Taliep Petersen's death, many popular newspaper articles celebrated his skills as a performer, but there was no book that offered insight into the rich life of this notable artist. It so happened that Paula Fourie, who was a post-graduate researcher specializing in musicology, decided to embark on her doctoral studies. When she heard about Taliep Petersen's substantial contribution to the entertainment industry during the apartheid period, she realized that she was about to research the life of an extraordinary public entertainer.

Anyone who has browsed through or closely read Paula Fourie's tome that covered various aspects of Taliep Petersen's life will agree that Fourie produced an edifying and informative text: a publication that relied heavily on oral and written sources. It was a book that succeeded in providing a very balanced insight into the life of Taliep Petersen. At this juncture, the reviewer wishes to emphasize that Fourie has indeed done the Cape community a great service as a researcher and musicologist.

Even though Fourie seems to have been satisfied with her doctoral thesis, she realized the need to radically revise and transform the thesis into a readable book. Since she began to rework the text, she admitted in her introduction that it is 'barely recognizable' (p. viii); one can imagine that though it was a painstaking effort, it resulted in a remarkable publication. Fourie chose to divide it into five broad sections. Part I she titled 'District Six, Childhood' (pp. 1-48); Part II 'The Early Years' (pp. 49-104); Part III 'Towards Artistic Autonomy' (pp. 105-180); Part IV 'Enter Kramer' (pp. 181-278); and Part V '*Inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'un*' (pp. 279-346 [This italicized Arabic phrase that Fourie adopted to wind up her text refers to Taliep Petersen's death, and the translation is: 'From God we come and to God we shall return']). Each of these parts was subdivided into uneven chapters.

Importantly, she gave each sub-section a title that reflected its contents. Three random samples are of interest: see Ch. 19 (p. 107), 'It's OUR show. The music is our own, the ideas are our own, the décor is our own – and, most important, the money is our own,' highlighted to what extent Taliep Petersen and those who were with him expressed true ownership – a feeling that could not be expressed at an earlier stage in their lives. Ch. 46 (pp. 228-237), 'There wasn't a seat for a fly to come inside this place,' reflects to what extent Taliep Petersen's show caught the attention of an attentive audience that was hooked on what he showcased. And Ch. 57 (pp. 295-297) is titled 'Ek is Taliep Petersen en sal julle host wies op hierdie journey deur ose geskeidenis virrie next dertien wieke' [tr. 'I am TP and I will be your host on this journey by (narrating) our history for the next thirteen weeks']; the chapter underscored his confidence in what he had produced and was more than happy to take his audience on this inspirational journey.

One of the positive features of Fourie's work was that on almost every page one hears, or rather reads, the comments or statements of an array of individuals who had not only met Taliep Petersen but who had often interacted with him. In

this comprehensible publication, the voices of family members and close friends could be read. Their observations and knowledge of Taliep Petersen helped to provide a fairly good understanding of how he lived his life. In fact, Fourie's skills as a researcher and biographer shaped a captivating story that has indeed brought him back to life; it tells the reader about snippets of his childhood, vignettes into his teenage phase, and windows into his later life. It skillfully sketched Taliep Petersen's life from the time he was a participant in the Cape Coon Carnival (see p. 126, a scene from Carnival a la District 6 towards the end of the 1970s) and Club Orleans Dixieland Band (p. 139) to his collaborative efforts in directing the musical play on the stage in London's West End (see Ch. 53, especially pp. 270-273).

When taking a closer look at Taliep Petersen, one observed that he, apart from being a good-natured person who liked to entertain others, was open to cooperating and collaborating with others artistically. Many notable personalities who collaborated with him enthusiastically were Zayn Adams (pp. 56-57), Paul Hanmer (pp. 140-142), and David Kramer (Part IV pp. 183-277 [Chapters 36-53]). Part IV underscores the long intimate relationship that emerged between David Kramer and Taliep Petersen; this special bond witnessed the production of *District Six* and a number of other musicals (see Reference that lists 'links' related to this musical and its various tracks; also see Borger's kind comments 2016). As one flips through Fourie's very informative biography of Taliep Petersen, one is struck by the extensive coverage and the detailed reflections on some of the entertainer's rich life. Fourie, in fact, highlighted and brought to the fore a multi-talented individual who had a likable, charismatic personality. He was 'a man for all seasons' with whom one could easily strike up an affiliation. Despite being slightly withdrawn in public, he always demonstrated his sociable self.

Fourie titled the biography quite aptly: *Mr. Entertainer: The Story of Taliep Petersen*. As previously mentioned, Taliep Petersen participated in a competition and was selected on that occasion as Mr. Entertainer (see pp. 62-63); it was since then, until his death, that he proved that he was indeed one of Cape Town's respected artists. On the publication's cover, it stated that '*Mr. Entertainer* evokes not just Taliep's life, but also the music and entertainment worlds of the 1950s to 2000s and their diverse and irrepressible cultural traditions.' This description captured the book's essence.

Through Taliep Petersen's eyes, and in the way Fourie narrated the story, one gets a sense of what apartheid and post-apartheid were like; it underscored the struggles that entertainers of color had to encounter and endure from the time the doors opened for him during the late 1960s until beyond the decade of South Africa's democracy. Overall, Taliep Petersen illustrated his resilience, his enthusiasm, and his passion for the showbiz industry. He was not driven by the material benefits that the industry generated but by the rich talent that he possessed and displayed. Fourie's storylines illustrated to what extent Taliep Petersen lived a fairly modest life.

Generally, Taliep Petersen's contribution to the entertainment industry was palpable, and many appreciated it; when his life came to an abrupt end, as observed in the final part (Part V), the industry was saddened but also realized that it had lost one of its most talented 'self-made' entertainers/artists—someone who struggled but who had believed in himself and demonstrated his ability to serve the community through his performances and shows on and off stage.

In concluding this review, it should be stated that researchers—despite undertaking thorough research—always overlook a text or two that could have added value to their studies. In this instance, one could not trace Kay Jaffer's interesting 1998 essay on Taliep Petersen—an essay that could have added some insights, considering the fact that Kay Jaffer and Taliep Petersen come from the same Cape Muslim community. Even though it is a minor criticism, it was necessary to bring in scholarly voices that have a good understanding of this Cape Muslim community.

Nonetheless, Fourie's work has added to the genre of South African Biographical Studies, one that is increasing and offering interesting insights into little-known personalities. To echo what was already stated by someone else: 'Paula Fourie has pieced together a fascinating portrait of Taliep Petersen, acutely observed and poignantly captured.' On the book's cover, the historian Bill Nasson underlined that this book was 'meticulously researched and (it was) written with acute observation, personal warmth, and clear-eyed honesty...' For this reviewer, Cape Town-born Taliep Petersen was definitely 'a people's person and a charismatic entertainer.'

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